



Spring 2013

## The Lantern, 2012-2013

Nora Sternlof  
*Ursinus College*

Kerrey Kahn  
*Ursinus College*


Quinn Gilman-Forlini  
*Ursinus College*

Chelsea Callahan  
*Ursinus College*

Anna Lorine  
*Ursinus College*

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

**Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---

### Recommended Citation

Sternlof, Nora; Kahn, Kerrey; Gilman-Forlini, Quinn; Callahan, Chelsea; Lorine, Anna; Zander, Sophie; Putscher, Caroline; Knowles, Dominick; Brenner, Samuel; Sierzega, Amanda; Duffy, Emily; Fogel, Emily; Campbell, Chloe; Tran, Andrew; Bicking, Maxwell; Goldstein, Jillian; Gorenberg, Erica; Niedmann, Alex; Knowles, Kelsey; Metcalf-Kelly, Logan; Kosik, Edwin; Martinez, Gladys; Hovick, Olivia; English, Shane; Haley, Brooke; Esser-Munera, Isabella; Hoffman, Joshua; Heimbaugh, Michael; Lobo, Anna; Cichowski, Kristin; Neslen, Brett; Cavanaugh, Allison; Reuman, Monica '15; Eble, Rikki Kathryn; Cooper, Angier; Nunes, Rayna; Breitsman, Stephanie; Lepore, Julianna; Blunt, Rachel; and Kovacs, Nicole, "The Lantern, 2012-2013" (2013). *The Lantern Literary Magazines*. 179.

<https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern/179>

---

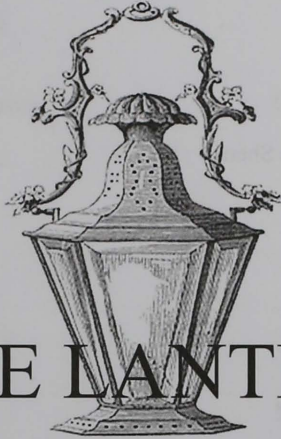
**Authors**

Nora Sternlof, Kerrey Kahn, Quinn Gilman-Forlini, Chelsea Callahan, Anna Lorine, Sophie Zander, Caroline Putscher, Dominick Knowles, Samuel Brenner, Amanda Sierzega, Emily Duffy, Emily Fogel, Chloe Campbell, Andrew Tran, Maxwell Bicking, Jillian Goldstein, Erica Gorenberg, Alex Niedmann, Kelsey Knowles, Logan Metcalf-Kelly, Edwin Kosik, Gladys Martinez, Olivia Hovick, Shane English, Brooke Haley, Isabella Esser-Munera, Joshua Hoffman, Michael Heimbaugh, Anna Lobo, Kristin Cichowski, Brett Neslen, Allison Cavanaugh, Monica Reuman '15, Rikki Kathryn Eble, Angier Cooper, Rayna Nunes, Stephanie Breitsman, Julianna Lepore, Rachel Blunt, and Nicole Kovacs



# The Lantern





# THE LANTERN



**URSINUS  
COLLEGE**

Volume LXXXII

Issue I

2012-2013

---

## **Staff**

### **Editor**

Jennifer Beigel

### **Section Editors**

**Poetry:** Jane Lee

**Visual Arts:** Leah Garrity

**Fiction:** MJ McGinn

**Nonfiction/Drama:** Sara Sherr

### **Copy Editors**

Katie Pierpont

Jane Lee

### **Production Editor**

Tara Leszkowicz

### **Contributor Bio Editors**

Andrew Eron

John Robinson

### **Treasurer**

Jessica Neuman

### **Fiction Staff**

Blaise Laramée

Colleen Jones

Henry Willshire

Nora Sternlof

Rachel Perry

Kelsey Knowles

Conor Palmer

Logan Metcalf-Kelly

### **Poetry Staff**

Emily Cooper

Shane English

Josh Hoffman

---

Olivia Hovick  
Megan Strong  
Derek Wright

**Non-Fiction Staff**

Hope Charney  
Emily Duffy  
Quinn Gilman-Forlini  
Brooke Haley  
Emerson Hawkins  
Kerrey Kahn  
Amanda Sierzega  
Sydney Katin

**Visual Arts Staff**

Rachel Bonner  
Jennie Kuhn  
Macy Smith

**Faculty Advisor**

Jon Volkmer

Working on the Lantern this year has been a fantastic opportunity and I would like to thank everyone who has helped me along the way.

To my staff, thank you for responding to my frantic late night emails, for silently bearing the many last minute schedule changes, and for working your hardest to make this magazine excellent. To Dr. Volkmer, thank you for guiding my staff and me along the way and making sure we were on the right track. To the contributors, thank you for giving us the opportunity to share your work. I cannot thank you enough, as without you, this magazine would not exist.

And to the Ursinus community, thank you for allowing the Lantern to be part of your lives. This is our eighty-second edition and we are proud to share with you the best creative work your fellow students have to offer.

Jennifer Beigel

---

## Cover

"Bird" by Nicole Kovacs

*Taken at the Avian Center of the Philadelphia Zoo using a Nikon D3100 with a Nikon DX AF-S NIKKOR 18-55mm lens.*

## Prize Winners

Prose Winner – Judge: Alan McCabe.....	7
Poetry Prize – Judge: Monica Hoopes.....	17
Creager Prize – Judge: Paul Guidry.....	23

## Poetry

How They Run.....	Nora Sternlof.....	18
What Was Said in Boston.....	Kerrey Kahn.....	20
On the Last Day of the Month.....	Quinn Gilman-Forlini.....	45
An Angel Tries to Surprise Humans.....	Chelsea Callahan.....	48
I Wonder if God Modeled Boys after Books.....	Anna Lorine.....	58
Marred with Modern Scars.....	Sophie Zander.....	59
Feather Bed.....	Kristin Cichowski.....	70
Ode to a Pen.....	Caroline Putscher.....	72
Objet Petit A.....	Dominick Knowles.....	81
Breaking News: Grownups Fear Return of Disco.....	Samuel Brenner.....	83
Neuroscience.....	Quinn Gilman-Forlini.....	84
New Document.....	Anna Lorine.....	90
We were Stars, and the Sky was Our Grass.....	Amanda Sierzega.....	91
About a Man.....	Emily Duffy.....	93
Trojan.....	Kristin Cichowski.....	94
An Ode.....	Emily Fogel.....	96
Yr Body Sour.....	Dominick Knowles.....	121
That Lake in Jamaica.....	Chloe Campbell.....	127
Live While Chiefs Are Still Fighting.....	Andrew Tran.....	128
Lament for Mathematics.....	Maxwell Bicking.....	129
The Robert Frost House.....	Nora Sternlof.....	130
People Fell in Love on Me.....	Amanda Sierzega.....	132
Sunday Review.....	Quinn Gilman-Forlini.....	133
Looks Silly in Tiny Desk Chairs.....	Chloe Campbell.....	134



Two Years Later.....	Jillian Goldstein.....	143
Better than Nothing.....	Erica Gorenberg.....	145
Istanbul.....	Alex Niedmann.....	146
Packs of Cigarettes.....	Kelsey Knowles.....	159
Sonnet.....	Logan Metcalf-Kelly.....	161
Outside King of Steaks.....	Chelsea Callahan.....	162
Obstinace.....	Chloe Campbell.....	164
Coffee Grinds.....	Anna Lorine.....	185
Autumn Equinox.....	Alex Niedmann.....	186

### **Non-Fiction and Drama**

Homecoming.....	Edwin Kosik.....	24
Oh, San Francisco.....	Gladys Martinez.....	33
Slide: A Beginning.....	Olivia Hovick.....	50
Slowly Last Summer.....	Nora Sternlof.....	74
Of Dogs and Men.....	Logan Metcalf-Kelly.....	88
Letters Not Sent.....	Edwin Kosik.....	123

### **Fiction**

Before the Race.....	Anthony Sierzega.....	8
The Little Things.....	Shane English.....	34
Tarpon Springs.....	Emily Duffy.....	61
Payment for Rebellion.....	Brooke Haley.....	113
Wednesday.....	Isabella Esser-Munera.....	135
When is President's Day?.....	Anna Lorine.....	141
Heartless Parallels and Perpendiculars.....	Joshua Hoffman.....	147
Railway.....	Brett Neslen.....	166
Presto agitato.....	Michael Heimbaugh.....	172
Easier Said than Done.....	Anna Lobo.....	181

### **Visual Arts**

Waves.....	Allison Cavanaugh.....	97
Four White Women.....	Edwin Kosik.....	98
Rope.....	Olivia Hovick.....	99
Alter Ego Self Portrait.....	Monica Reuman.....	100
Pebbles.....	Rikki Eble.....	101
Coney Island.....	Monica Reuman.....	102
Guanajuato.....	Monica Reuman.....	103
Growth.....	Angier Cooper.....	104

Evolve.....	Angier Cooper.....	105
Winter Blackout.....	Erica Gorenberg.....	106
Honeybee.....	Rayna Nunes.....	107
Frames.....	Stephanie Breitsman.....	108
Wanderlust.....	Julianna Lepore.....	109
Guiding Light 1.....	Michael Heimbaugh.....	110
Frick's Lock.....	Rikki Eble.....	111
The Ones that Never Leave.....	Stephanie Breitsman.....	112
Contributors.....		187
IN MEMORIAM Rachel Blunt.....		192

Winner

“Before the Race” by Anthony Sierzega

**Judge’s Note**

My friends have always been very important to me, and sometimes I used to find myself making friends with difficult people. The intro to this story drew me in like a magnet because the narrator tries to dissect the roots of his friendship with his neighbor, and from there he takes it to a place I never expected it to go. It’s a terrible story, a tragedy, but a fascinating read because it is told so well. I also was very impressed by how deftly the dialogue was penned. Everything that the mother said for instance rang true for a woman in the position she was in.

**Alan McCabe ‘94** was born with the rare genetic condition, cystinosis. As a result he has had three kidney transplants and is 5’1” and blind. His brother was born with it also and died at age 24 when Alan was a junior at Ursinus. A frequent contributor to *The Lantern*, Alan’s story “By the End of February,” a story set in a dialysis unit, got the prose prize in Fall 1992 and his poem “Wake,” about his brother’s funeral, was judged the winner in Spring 1993.



## Before the Race

The butterflies in my stomach turned into a pack of pterodactyls. Today was the big day, race day. I would be lining up on the track for the Pennsylvania Outdoor State Track and Field championship in a few hours. Our relay team was ranked number one in the state, and with clean handoffs we were a lock to win. I stared down the last straightaway, 100 meters away from gold and glory. The crowd was large, loud and a little surprised to see four goofy looking white kids from the suburbs contending for the 100 meter relay championship. Our purple and gold cheering section stood out among the hundreds of spectators screaming our names. We were on the podium with medals around our necks, crying in each other's arms. Just don't drop the baton and we'd be remembered forever.

The siren of an ambulance drowned out the cheering. I looked around to find the source with no luck. Blue and red lights began to flash in the sky, scaring the hell out of me. I suddenly snapped out of my dream and shot up in my bed. I pulled the shade to check out the action outside. The flashing lights were coming from right across the street in front of Kurt's house. Without thinking, I grabbed my phone and called him. No answer. I walked downstairs to find my mom looking out the front door.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Not sure, it looks like the ambulance is right in front of the Mac's house. I can't tell what's going on," she said.

"Do you think I should head over there? I hope it isn't anything too serious. Let me walk over," I said.

"Quick look. Do you see the stretcher? It's too dark I can't tell who's on it, get shoes on and run out."

I slipped on the shoes and rushed toward Kurt's house. Before I could get a better look, the EMTs slammed the back door of the ambulance and it sped off down the road. I stood in the middle of the street staring at the blue and red lights. After a few seconds spent lost in thought, I walked back up my lawn and yelled to my mom I was going to check to see if anyone was home across the street.

"Make sure everything is ok, and call me when you know what's happening. Just remember to try to get some sleep tonight," she yelled.

The front door was unlocked. I walked in to find Kurt silently sitting in the living room watching TV. His pale, scrawny body looked even more pale and scrawny than usual. His awkward hands rested against his cheeks, with his eyes staring at the television. He nodded his head to acknowledge my existence, but said nothing.

The usual bags under his eyes were even more prominent, slowly pulling down his face.

"What was up with the ambulance, dude?" I asked. "Is everybody ok? What happened?"

Kurt sat silent. He looked at me for a second and then back to the TV.

"Check out this show," he said. "These newborn spiders kill their mom and dad right after they're born and eat them. And some fish eat like one-third of their babies."

"Kurt, there was an ambulance outside. What is going on?"

"It's fine, man. Let's just watch some TV," he said.

I took a seat next to him on the couch. Kurt kept his head down. "Alright, dude, I'll stay for a little, but if everything is ok I probably should get back to sleep. My race is tomorrow. "

"Shit, my bad, I totally forgot," he said. "I guess you should probably get back then."

"I can stay a little. Just tell me what happened."

"I don't know, man, my mom just found him in the bathroom. He swallowed a lot of pills. I don't know how he's still alive. She's freaking out though. Like crying hysterically and babbling.

"He tried to kill himself?" I asked. "Your dad? That's what the ambulance was for? What?" Mr. Mac couldn't have committed suicide.

"It's all good. My mom's going to call me if anything changes. I just want to sit here and relax. I know your thing is tomorrow, but if you could stay that'd be nice."

"Of course I'll stay, bro," I said. "As long as you need me."

We sat in silence for a while. I looked at him and thought about our friendship for a moment. We were total opposites. I mastered every sport from peewee football to tee ball to karate, while Kurt probably did not have an athletic bone in his body. He preferred reading the stories of Edgar Allen Poe and listening to bands that probably made sacrifices to Satan. I had no problem making friends and talked to everyone. Kurt usually stayed to himself and really only spoke to me and the kids he smoked cigarettes with before going to class. I wore preppy clothes, he looked homeless. He was a hipster before it was cool to be a hipster. The classic odd couple, no one understood why we even hung out together. I didn't exactly know why either. I guess he was just always there, and it was relief to be with a real human and not the dumb jocks and plastic girls I was forced to spend time with.

We had real conversations, unlike the ones I had with my sports friends that society expected me to have, like who won the game last night or what hot chick we boned over the weekend.

Kurt flipped the channel to some weird show about the lost history of the Bible on the history channel. This was the kind of stupid stuff he loved to watch. I wasn't paying attention, but Kurt's eyes were glued to the TV. I thought about his mom. Mrs. Mac was an angel. She was the imaginary stay at home mom making cookies that exists only in old TV shows. She always wore this old blue and white apron, showing she was ready to bake at all times. I'd come home from school to see a pie cooling off in the window. She was a second mom to me, always going to all of my meets with Kurt and cheering like I belonged to her. I could not remember her saying anything that wasn't positive. She always smiled, and always appeared to be happy.

My mind shifted to Mr. Mac. He was usually quiet, but not a depressed quiet. He'd always say hello, but then just float up to his bedroom and sleep. I knew everything about Mrs. Mac, but barely anything about her husband. It was weird because he was an accountant at Perkins Financial, the same as my Mom. The firm provided financial planning to some of the wealthiest people in Pennsylvania, and Mr. Mac

was sort of a legend among accountants, always saving the company and its customer's asses. But that was all I knew about him. We'd talk about track occasionally, but other than that it was just small talk or silence. Maybe he couldn't take work anymore. My mom told me the last few weeks had been a little crazy. The bosses were always screaming at each other, while Mr. Mac calmly talked them down. But there was no way anything at work could lead to this. Maybe it was just a huge misunderstanding and a freak accident.

That's definitely what it was, just a bizarre accident. Kurt still was focused on the conspiracies surrounding the life of Jesus.

"What if Jesus actually had a brother," Kurt said, breaking the silence. "The Pope would probably shit his pants. James, the Lord's brother. It's actually written all over the place! How can people not see it?"

"Jesus didn't have a brother, you idiot. This stuff is all bullshit for weirdos like you."

"Whatever man, stay on the side against facts and reason."

"Your dad just tried to kill himself and you only care about Jesus' imaginary brother. What is wrong with you? If you're just trying to act brave in front of me, knock it off. I'd be crying my eyes out right now."

Kurt mumbled something and changed the channel back to the damn spiders on the Discovery Channel. No one said anything until a documentary about

Jim Jones came on. I couldn't believe we were watching a documentary about mass suicide.

"I bet my dad wished he'd known about Jim Jones' Kool-Aid recipe," Kurt said.

He made a joke about suicide. I had no response to that. We sat in more silence, learning about how all those poor, innocent people took their own lives.

The home phone rang breaking another string of silence. It was Mrs. Mac. I could hear her try to talk through the tears. It wasn't working.

"Mom, you have to calm down. I can't understand you," Kurt said.



"I'll be there as soon as I can. Love you too. Bye."

"I'll drive," I said. "You should probably take it easy."

"I don't know if I can go to the hospital," he said. "I don't think I can see her like that, crying like a maniac."

"You really should go. Your mom needs you."

"Alright, hold on. These pants have been falling down all day. I need to grab a belt. And I have to pee too."

I could feel my eyelids drooping as we walked back across the street to my car. I tried to feel out how things were going, but Kurt's body language gave nothing away. His stare was eerie and it seemed like his body was just empty, with his mind floating around in space. Kurt was always a little hard to read and I was struggling to find the right words to say to him. I remember in ninth grade the afternoon his first girlfriend dumped him I found him in his driveway burning ants with a magnifying glass. He said it was some kind of metaphor.

"My mom said he wants to talk to me for a little," Kurt said. "I don't know what he can possibly say now. He hid it well for so long, but now everyone's going to find out."

"Hid what well?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"It took me awhile but I figured it out. He's got depression. Bad. Not just a little sad some of the time, like really, really sad all of the time. He'd go days without talking to me and my mom. I don't know how he made it this long without trying anything."

"Damn dude, that's crazy. I don't even know what to say."

The generic radio rap music droned in the background as we pulled up into the hospital parking garage. We found the room and Mrs. Mac uncomfortably curled up into a chair next to her husband, like a loyal soldier staying by the side of a fallen friend. His eyes were fixed to the television and he barely acknowledged us walking into the room. He was alive, but I could see the life sucked out of him like a balloon barely staying afloat. His usual sad face was now a depressed face. Kurt gently shook his mom to wake her up.

"Hey, boys, good to see you," Mrs. Mac said, somehow smiling.

The bags under her eyes were clearly visible, and she looked years older. It occurred to me that this was the first time I had seen her without makeup on.

Mr. Mac spoke next. "Hey, Kurt," he said. "Corey, what are you doing here? Our big track star should not be awake right now. Go home and get some sleep. Besides, I just need to talk to Kurt for a little."

"Corey, why don't you and I get some snacks?" Mrs. Mac said. She rose from her chair and guided me out of the room. The hysterical crying woman on the phone was gone. I don't know how she pulled herself together, but I was impressed by her courage.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Mac," I said. "I really don't know what to say. Is he ok? Are you ok? Kurt hasn't said all that much."

"Everything's ok, Cor, Mr. Mac is alright and Kurt is still trying to figure things out I think. I hope your mother isn't too upset you've been out all night. You know we'll all be there tomorrow and you have to make us proud."

"Kurt would do the same for me," I said. "Don't even think about coming to my race tomorrow, this is way more important." That probably wasn't really true. I trained my whole life for that race, and the nerves were still swirling around my entire body. I remembered I was supposed to text my mom and let her know what was going on. She was probably asleep anyway and didn't even know I was still gone.

Mrs. Mac pulled a few bills from her purse and bought some candy out of the vending machine. I politely turned down a Snickers bar. Coach would kill me. I bought a water bottle and we sat together in the back of the cafeteria. "This hospital is so nice," she said. "I'm usually scared of hospitals, but this one is different."

St. Mary's was a rundown piece of crap. Everything was crammed and the wall paper was staring to peel off. "It's not too bad," I lied. "I never like being in hospitals either. The sick people are so depressing." Depressing probably wasn't the best word, but Mrs. Mac didn't catch it.

"How are your legs feeling?" she asked. "Are you nervous? You shouldn't be, you guys will be great. But remember you're already a

winner.”

Always so positive. “Mrs. Mac, I’ll be fine. How are you? I was so scared when Kurt told me what happened. I heard you crying earlier, is he going to be ok?”

She smiled. “Corey, please go home and get your sleep. I want to see you smiling on that medal stand.”

I gave her a hug and walked into the bathroom. Mrs. Mac made her way back to the room, and then the screaming started. I hurried out and saw nurses and doctors storming Mr. Mac’s room. I froze. I could see Kurt across the hall staring into the room. Mrs. Mac’s sweet voice was now filled with terror. After what seemed like hours, I finally regained control of my legs and got over to the room. The commotion began to stop, but Mrs. Mac’s cries still lingered in the halls. I couldn’t figure out exactly what was going on, but deep down I knew what had just happened. Mr. Mac succeeded where he failed earlier.

I saw Kurt look at me for a split second outside the room. His face remained emotionless and his eyes shot down toward the ground. That idea that best friends have some telepathic means of communication is bullshit. I had no idea what he was thinking at that moment. The nurses started to walk out of the room, looking clearly disturbed. Mrs. Mac was on the floor sobbing. I could feel my eyes getting heavier and the tears began to flow. Kurt kept a serious face. Somehow I made it down the hall and far enough into the room to see an empty bed and nurses shaking in the bathroom, staring at the dangling body. I ran out of the room and found Kurt, who stared at me with an ambivalent face.

We sat in the waiting room for about another hour. Mrs. Mac, still crying, filled out a lot of paperwork saying it wasn’t the hospital’s fault. All he needed was five minutes of privacy to cut off the oxygen to his brain. Kurt kept his head down the whole time, and didn’t even look at his mom, let alone give her a hug. The police didn’t say much. Kurt said his dad told him he loved him and walked into the bathroom. Nothing else. The police told us to go home.

Kurt still wasn’t crying. Did he really not want to shed tears in



front of me that bad? He thanked a guy who held the door for us as we left the hospital. The weather was still perfect. I had no idea what time it was, but I knew I needed to get to bed. We stopped in front of my car. I gave Kurt a hug as we stood alone in the empty garage.

Still no tears. "Let's just go," Kurt said.

"What did he say?" I asked. "You were still in the room, right? How can you just stand here and say nothing?" I started to cry a little more.

"He told me to take care of Mom. That was it." Kurt paused a second and took a deep breath. "You know, I'm not sad. It's going to be tough for a little, but he died a while ago. Now he'll be happy."

I was at a loss of words. He wasn't even my dad, and I was crying. He barely talked to me. I knew him forever, but I didn't really know him. I had no idea how Kurt was so ok with all of this, until I noticed him struggling to keep his pants up. No belt. I didn't say anything.

Kurt grabbed my keys. "I'll drive us home." He turned the radio up a little and we drove home without talking. We got out of the car in front of my house and I tearfully looked at his still emotionless face. We hugged one more time.

"I'm so sorry," I said. I couldn't find any other words. I looked into his face, the ghostly white skin and pointy chin illuminated by the shining porch light. No tears. I couldn't even see any pain.

Kurt let go. "Get to bed, bro. I'll be there tomorrow. You better not drop that baton." He turned around and walked back slowly to his empty house, not looking back once.

Kurt disappeared into his house, and later from my life. We saw each other around school and the neighborhood, but never said much. A few months later my mom and I ended up moving when she lost her job at Perkins Financial. Actually everyone at the firm lost their jobs. I could never get myself to read the stories, but the headlines in the local papers said enough. Mr. Mac wasn't the bad guy, but he covered their greedy asses and hid their crimes and couldn't take it anymore. The poor guy just did what he was told.



Kurt and Mrs. Mac didn't make it to my race to see me on top of the medal stand. The gold medal from that day hangs in my room, but it doesn't remind me of any glory.

---

## Poetry Prize

Winner

“How They Run” by Nora Sternlof

### Judge's Note

This poem is about transcendence. From the friend who finds her way home in the ache of her soles to the cleaning lady who worships at the altar of an eight-mile run, it is a breathtaking reminder of why we move (and are moved) in every sense of the word.

Runner Up

“What Was Said in Boston” by Kerrey Kahn

A haunting love story of a poem. Across the bridge, from the cigarettes and hangovers to the music of the city, it is a gritty and rhythmic memorial.

**Monica Hoopes '02** graduated with a B.A. in English, and subsequently received an M.F.A. in poetry from the New School University and a J.D. from the Seton Hall University School of Law. As an undergraduate, she published a variety of pieces in *The Lantern*, and received the fall 1999 prose prize. She now practices law and resides with her husband and two children in New Jersey.

## How They Run

A friend told me once  
that she only felt she lived in a place  
after she had run through it-  
spooled its miles behind her  
made cinema of its thin trees, its rusted bridges, its low houses  
(vignettes of the white Lutheran church  
and the pizza place laced with neon)  
with the pulse of her feet in her old gray shoes.  
When she'd made a place the ache in her high arches  
and the stumbling of breath in her raw throat-  
*Then it's mine*, she told me, and I asked,  
*How can you tell?*  
*Easy*, she said. *I dream of it.*

A friend told me once  
that she hated the trail that ran by her house  
because of its benches.  
They all offered rest, but were none unburdened  
by a name, and two dates in thin clear script  
on the third bars of their backs.  
*I hate to stop when I run*, she told me, but  
she couldn't pass these benches without halting  
to read the name and count out the years  
in the bar between birth and death.  
She'd read where the person was believed to be now-  
in the arms of the angels, in the presence of God,  
or just watching over us, somewhere above.  
*And I don't believe in any of the crap*, she said  
but was (Enlightenment child) compelled  
to calculate in place of prayer.

My uncle had a cleaning lady. I saw her once.

When she spoke she drew  
her three fingers together  
to hold the ghost of a cigarette.  
But she'd tell anyone who'd listen  
that she'd quit three years ago  
and run eight miles every morning since.

My uncle recounted the story once  
of how he couldn't help but ask,  
*What do you think about?*  
And how she'd answered, *I talk*  
*to God. I guess you could say running's my worship.*  
*But you go to church, he said. Every Sunday.*  
*That's for the Church, she said,*  
*The one the Lord established*  
*And its good people, the clergy and the congregation. But in this world,*  
*This whole creation*  
*Something must be between Him and me.*

## What Was Said in Boston

"How was the drive?"

She asked, getting into the car.

I was annoyed because

I was hungry and the one-way streets of

Boston were determined to take me where I didn't want to go.

So I thought of saying something cynical and

Maybe I did, but I don't remember because

Just then, she reached around my seat and

Her chilly hands pulled a sigh from my chest.

She used to hug me like she was pulling me into deep water

In which I gladly drowned as she squeezed the air from my lungs.

I held onto a dream that I could mean the world to her.

"Nice pants," I said. They were yellow.

"Are you making fun of me?"

"Shut up."

Then, her best friend, Madde, came in and

She looked gorgeous, but I couldn't think of

A way to tell her that didn't imply

I thought she was ugly the last time I saw her.

Another friend followed who wasn't gorgeous but

Hilarious and I thought about

How many people have come to one place for

A brief part of one beautiful life.

She invited me into her world; I accepted without knowing

What it meant to meet a person like her.

I held onto a dream that I could mean the world to her.

"This is weird," she said.

I decided not to deal with it because

I was already far beyond sobriety on an empty stomach,

Sitting next to someone I loved and



Someone else who will convince herself she loves me.  
So I ignored the easier conversations and ate,  
Failing to suppress my growing dread until,  
She took his hand. They weaved through the traffic and crowds.

The gap grew greater as a reminder of  
The insurmountable distance of time and space that lies between our lives.  
Five months and hundreds of miles earlier,  
Driving in circles, her touch was as soft as the glass she held for me.  
I held onto a dream that I could mean the world to her.  
“Do you want to take the bridge?” She asked and smiled at me.  
“Yeah, where is it?”  
“It’s above the tee.”  
“The what?”  
“The tee... the subway? The T!”  
“Oh. Of course. *Ob*-viously the T,” I said, returning her smile and  
She laughed for the first time that I noticed.  
She convinced the seven of us to go her way, so  
We walked across the bridge and everybody looked out  
In awe including Madde but she kept walking,  
Smoking a cigarette in a landscape she already owned.  
When we made it to her apartment,  
We were fucked up and she wrapped herself in a blanket,  
And we all slowly admitted we were tired.

She used to spend her mornings curled up in an impossibly small pile of  
sheets.  
I used to pray my time would be more enticing than the spaces in between.  
I held onto a dream that I meant the world to her.

We cured Saturday’s hangover with Sunday’s indulgence,  
We found ourselves walking in her beautiful footsteps again,  
And we took the burn in our lungs with the sun and the wind and the

rhythm of the city  
I glimpsed into her life again and  
It's more beautiful and incomprehensible than ever but,  
I've already been crippled, incarcerated, and consumed by  
Her already. And each time I get a view, I will be  
Again in a different way. I smiled, because  
Not many have the privilege of learning  
Their feelings in the past were true and real.

"Are you happy?"

She took a moment before she smiled and nodded,

"Yes." with resounding honesty.

Everyone left; she and I remained in a crystalizing moment.

I took two steps down the stairs and five months of dormant thoughts

Began to surface and clash, and I struggled to organize them.

Precious seconds tore by and I drowned in the accelerating torrent of  
emotional white noise and,

I broke the silence when I swallowed it all in a dense lump.

"I love you."

"I love you, too," the last word was warped by her smile,

Which expanded like the universe with life and power.

Her mind is a prism that bends the light of the world,

Taking in chaos and releasing color bands of beauty and truth,

And she was choosing equal parts when I was still coping with sunsets,

A child who thought being alive would be enough to be loved.

I let go of the dream that I could mean the world to her,

And held on to the moment that I did.

"See you later."

"Goodbye."

---

## The Creager Prize

Winner

“Homecoming” by Edwin Kosik

### Judge’s Note

This is the type of beautifully written work that seamlessly weaves together unique introspection with universal themes. At once personal and relatable, each moment in “Homecoming” is expertly crafted with a precision and pace that give visceral moments a dreamlike quality and make concepts as abstract as time and relationships as tactile as the tension in a rubber band.

Runner Up

“Oh, San Francisco” by Gladys Martinez

“Oh, San Francisco” has the type of real-world lyricism of a Bob Dylan song. This seemingly simple anecdote transports readers to their own moments frozen in time, and reminds us that we’re all trying to make sense of the “hobo dandruff” swirling in front of our faces.

**Paul Guidry ’99** has worked as a TV writer-producer and as an advertising copywriter as far away as The Czech Republic, Malaysia and Singapore, and as close to home as Atlanta, Chicago and New York. Paul’s pencil sketches appeared in several *Lanterns* and he had a story in another.



## Homecoming

The last time I see Barbara, I am leaving.

She is not herself, drawn out across a gurney like a piece of leather left in the sun. The pit left behind by a fruit devoured. I have no words for this woman. I do not even recognize her. She makes a joke about the needles in her arms, in her stomach, pumping medicine through her small frame. I look away. We are on an elevator comprised of mirrors, descending to the basement of this hospital. The Hospice nurse is smiling. She thinks Barbara is funny, tells me so: "Your aunt? She's funny!" I don't respond, and am surprised to find that for once, I do not feel guilty for my silence. Beside me, my father chooses not to put his hand on my shoulder. I am watching him watch me; his reflection, my reflection, is to my left, to my right; it is on the wall across from me, looking back. The doors open, allowing us to breathe once again, and we roll Barbara down a hallway, pushing her into a small room. She will be the subject of many tests: "we just...*cannot* find out what is wrong with her," the smiling nurse explains. This time, she is not smiling. She is bewildered. I am told to say goodbye to my aunt.

"Goodbye," I say.

"You're gonna have a *wonderful* time, bud," she whispers. This time, I smile. I feel stupid for smiling. This moment will return to me as a dolly shot in a movie, the camera rolling backwards, its eye remaining focused on something that only gets further away. This is how I will remember her. I am getting on an airplane. I am going to Italy.

The night before I learn that Barbara has died, she is already dead. Or in six hours, she will be dead, but here in Florence, it is already 6 o'clock. I am crying in my room, trying not to let my host-family know that anything is wrong. A portrait of the Virgin Mary is observing me at the of my bed, not unlike that one of an emaciated Christ that studied me at the dinner table moments ago as my host-family finished supper. I fiddle with the cheap plastic phone I acquired just days ago in my hands. I've just spoken to my mother in Harrisburg, and fragments of thoughts, of that conversation, linger in the room. My father has driven to the Poconos with

Carol so that they can be with their sister Barbara. Her lungs are filling with water. I try to think of something that my father can say to her from me, writing her a letter that I eventually discard in the waste-bin. In that letter, there are little pieces of her that I'd like to keep, but in attempting to preserve them, I recognize that they are already lost: the purple running shorts she once wore all year, discarded months ago; her laugh, mischievous and childlike, became a strained, distracted smile not long after the first treatment.

"Tell her to remember that no one could be loved more," I offer to my father on the phone, my voice a thread anxiously tugged taught. "OK, Ed," he sighs. It is Saturday night. I am in my room with the door closed.

My host-family finds me odd. Viktor, a silent man with a broad-chest and white hair, does not understand what is wrong with me; he does not ask me how I am, but instead tells his wife Franca, a youthful forty-something with deep eyes and dark hair, to pose the question. He observes me across the table as Franca tilts her thin head to one side curiously: "Come stai, Edween?" I don't have the words for aunt, cancer, death, fear. I don't even have the words for *I don't understand*. So I just offer "Bene!" and smile. When Viktor, whose Italian filters through a gentle Ukrainian accent, asks Franca to ask me what I study, I look at him and say, "Come se dice, *how do you say*... literature?" He doesn't look at me when I am speaking to him. Only when I am looking at Franca. He grunts deeply in response to her correction, *letteratura*, and makes subtle asides to Franca's small, round, and big-bosomed mother, Mirella, that I do not understand. It does not seem fair to characterize Mirella by something as simple as her "smile" or "grin" during the quiet conversations we share over warm espresso after supper: she glows like the flame of a candle cupped between palms. The only English that Mirella knows is this: *oh my gosh*.

I am convinced that Viktor knows that I am gay. I am also convinced that he hates me. Viktor fixes computers for a living, and when he returns from work, he immediately sits at his own at his desk in his bedroom. If it were not for the simple fact that the screen of his computer is facing the hallway, I would assume that he is addicted to pornography.

He leaves his computer only to come to dinner, and then he returns to it until two or three in the morning, long after his wife has gone to sleep in the screen's white fluorescent glow. He rises early in morning, around seven o'clock, and departs for work at eight. Sometimes, in my bedroom, I use Google to find places in Florence where men meet other men. It is difficult, because the majority of bars and clubs cater to crowds that wish to remain anonymous. A men's bathhouse in northwestern Florence advertises itself as a place where visitors can check not just their clothing, but also their private lives at the door. I learn from one of my Italian professors that gay men in Italy rarely exist, and when they do, they have girlfriends. A local college student laughs when

I repeat this to her, and tells me it is true: *la barba*, she explains, grinning and rubbing her chin, "the beard." No one here knows that I am gay, but as I type e-mails to my mother (*how is dad?*) and look for any place that might allow me to escape, I can hear Viktor typing in the darkness of his bedroom. I become convinced that he can see what I am typing, and so I begin to filter my searches. Instead of gay bars, I find places where men go to cruise, to find anonymous sex. Along the Arno at one in the morning, one may find young men, not unlike myself, cruising for sex, sometimes selling their bodies, not just to older Italians, but Japanese, English, and American men, the most common tourists here in Florence. *Caro ragazzo*, "dear boy," one middle-aged man murmurs to another, not much younger than myself. His fingers trace the young man's cheek, and my hand instinctively covers the stubble of my own face. Breath thickening in my throat, I break away my gaze, stepping quickly through the shadows of an alleyway. A month into my experience abroad, I just want a reminder that people like myself exist.

I told Barbara that I am gay last spring. Or rather, I gave my mother permission to tell her I am gay last spring. I sat in the parking lot of a Harrisburg car dealership one evening after I got off work and silently shook-- with anger, or with fear, towards my aunt, or towards myself. I shouted at my mother when she called to tell me that my aunt Carol simply hopes that I'll still become a father. That she knows how much I want to



become a father. Barbara calls me a few days later and asks me if I know why she and Joe are not together anymore. I tell her I don't, though I have a feeling. She tells me that she asked him to leave because she was unsure about her feelings for one of her closest friends. Another woman. I tell her I didn't know that. It is May. Barbara walks with a cane these days. She is bald. I drive two hours to her house every week to mow her lawn and sometimes she does not stand up at all. One week she tells me to go to her room and take for myself what is on her dresser. There is nothing there but her camera. She has given most of her belongings away. A week later I receive a letter from her that simply says, "Three things: 1) To thine own self be true. 2) Take *great* pictures in Italy. 3) Remember that no one could be loved more." I place it on the bookshelf in my room. I do not write back. I do not know how.

It is November. 4 o'clock in the morning. I cringe as the door to the Iacopetti family's apartment moans against a threatening silence. As I walk down to the hallway towards my bedroom, I realize that Viktor is maneuvering through the darkness towards me. "Ciao, Viktor," I whisper, stupidly, and I think that what I see on his face, dimly illuminated by a nightlight, is a knowing smile. I am convinced that he knows I am spending my nights with Connor, the student from Virginia that I met on Couchsurfing last month. There is no logical reason why he would be aware that Connor exists, but the language barrier between us allows me to endow my host-father with a terrifying and bizarre sense of omniscience. One

night this month, I will sit down at the dinner table and Viktor will gleefully insist that Franca tell me the name of the dish we are eating tonight: *fenocchio*, which is not only the term for fennel, but also the Italian equivalent to *faggot*. My Italian has improved enough to converse with Viktor, and so without betraying my instinctive reaction of horror, I simply look across to my host-father, look him in the eye and respond: "Davvero? Molto strano!" *Really? How strange!* Instead of expressing disappointment like I expect him to, Viktor appears to be delighted with my reaction. For once, we laugh together. As we sip our espresso after

dinner, which Viktor serves every night, despite his very unusual preference for tea, he asks me about my necklace which I purchased in San Gimignano, a Tuscan town of ancient towers. I tell him that I purchased it for my aunt, and Franca asks innocently where she is. I fondle the stone in my fingers. I don't want to say dead, so I say *altrove*, the most appropriate word that comes to mind: *elsewhere*.

That stone is something Connor likes to play with during our time together. He and I ascend the creaking wooden rungs into his bedroom loft, careful to not wake his host-mother, and then collapse onto a faded blue mattress. Burrowing my nose into the warm tussles of his dirty blonde hair, his fingers slip under the silk of my shirt. He murmurs *let her go* into the caging of my chest. Connor is fond of telling me that there is nothing he holds onto—not friends, not family, not America, and certainly not lovers. It is a quality he demonstrates to me by running off to Barcelona for a weekend without anything but a copy of Herman Hesse's *Wandering* beneath his arm, crashing with a Canadian girl he met through Couchsurfing. There are times when I don't very much like Connor, but I find myself coming back to him nonetheless. Everything about him reminds me of home, of the states, of familiar places to which I've never been, but somehow remember. His hair is the color of harvest, of good death, like wheat glimmering golden beneath a setting sun, and his eyes are blue, or grey, like disappointment, or the glassy surface of an imagined James River that Connor stirs up in whispered remembrance of Virginia from the darkness of his bedroom. Like myself before I came here to Italy, Connor has never lost anyone, and part of me believes that I don't have to give up Barbara until I return home. What is the difference, I ask him, between someone being dead and someone simply not being present? As far as I am concerned, she is still where I left her, in the hospital's basement slowly drifting away. I am leaving her, not the other way around. In these moments, Connor is useless. He looks at other things, becomes a little boy.

When our classes end in December, Connor and I go to Paris. Because I will return to Florence for a few days before then returning

home, I tell my host-family that I am simply leaving for the United States. I do not want to have to see them again. Franca brushes her hand across her dark eyes, rushing from her side of the table to mine to embrace me before our last dinner together. I have just gifted her an American novel I've never read. When I hand Viktor his gift, a bag of tea from a local shop, he firmly shakes my hand, placing the fingers of his free hand on the sensitive underbelly of my wrist. He grins genuinely: "*Grazie*." It is only for a moment, but it feels like forgiveness, though whether from me to him or him to me, I'm not sure. Like a hermit opening a door to the sun after months of being shut away, his sudden kindness is too much; my first reaction is to retreat, to pull inwardly, but instead I eagerly return his handshake as well as his smile, thanking him. The light of this small exchange is so bright that I am tempted to rewrite all of our interactions before it. Yet to ignore the fear I felt not just living in his house, but sitting across from him at the dinner table, hoping every night that he would not return in time to eat so that I might enjoy the much more relaxed company of his wife and mother-in-law, would not be to tell the truth. These smaller dinners occurred from time to time, and they were peaceful evenings where I think everyone was a little bit more at ease, and despite that I conversed with Franca, Mirella, and Victor at every dinner that fall, it was only in Viktor's absence that I, a person who cherishes more than anything his ability to converse, felt that I ever truly spoke.

Throughout the ten days Connor and I spend in Paris, we explore the city by day and each other's bodies by night. If we spend one day seeking out the Cinémathèque Française, where many of the French New Wave directors received their film education, or visiting the graves of Oscar Wilde and Marcel Proust in the well-populated cemetery of Père Lachaise ("our own little queer pilgrimage," I joke to Connor), then in the next we pass hours looting the shelves of the bookstore Shakespeare and Company on the Left Bank, where I leave with the first volume of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. Upon returning to this bookstore the next morning, we discover a crowd barricading us from the store's entrance, and learn that the owner, George Whitman, died just that morning. I stare at the



black wooden letters of the sign above the door, join the crowd temporarily to light a candle, and then return to Connor. As we continue on along the Seine, I try to explain to him the sensation I am experiencing that, after having seen this bookstore and so much of Paris before in film, I continue to feel like I've been here before, and yet the Paris of reality is nothing like the Paris of the screen. Connor groans, telling me, as he frequently does, to just be here, to slow down my pace and look out at the river, or up at the Parisian chimneys. This time, however, he catches sight of a squirrel's carcass grotesquely strewn across the stone street. He tries to warn a woman approaching us from the opposing direction, *watch your step!*, but neither of us has the French to communicate this. We look away quickly, as this woman continues her path with her head pivoted back to us confusedly. Connor and I wander along the Seine silently, our paths parallel but our bodies never bumping, never making contact.

That evening we dine in a cheap little restaurant near Gare du Nord and then return to our hostel. On this walk back, we verbally spar, challenging each other's opinion one moment and then walking in stubborn silence the next. By the time we reach our small-square white bedroom, we are wrestling on the bed, hitting each other under the guise of play, but with every thrown fist doused in a tiny bit of contempt. This fighting inevitably devolves into fucking.

"Don't call it that," Connor instructs me, rejecting defensively the language with which I speak of how we spend our nights.

"Why," I ask him with an antagonizing smile, "what would you call it?" I'm amused with Connor's reluctance to speak on the status of our sex, since it was he who made sure to establish with me before our first night together in November that there would be no romance to our interaction, and that we will not speak of "afterwards," referring to the time after we return home. During our first week of sex, our third week of knowing one another, I let Connor take the lead on our relationship and what it meant; I was just happy to find someone with whom I could escape. Perhaps desperate for someone after Barbara's death, I threw my body at him, shaking, and he received it. This eagerness, or easiness, of

mine, made Connor grow bored with me quickly.

"You're leaving me nothing to chase," he'd tell me without looking up from his sketching of a woman's foot. Yet I have been feeling, in Paris, like Connor is far less capable of fulfilling this agreement of casualness than I am. In accepting reluctantly that there was no possibility of romance between the two of us, I allowed myself to become disappointed quickly and slowly move on, while Connor, I suspect, has gone into our tryst secretly suspecting that affection will bloom when we least expect it, the way that we go see movies about two seemingly incompatible people trusting that they will fall in love. Connor views this as a beginning, whereas I believe that I am already at home remembering everything, awake from a dream.

I remember now, months later looking back, one night when Connor and I climbed out on the roof of his Florentine apartment and looked out at the stars. There is very little electricity used in Florence, little light that is not natural and so the sky there appears otherworldly in its extravagance. From above one can see everything: the terracotta thumbprint that is the Duomo; the glimmer of the Arno reflecting back the moon; the maternal gaze of San Miniato al Monte, the oldest building here in Florence, high above it all and looking down, not lonely but alone.

Florence is a living mausoleum, a city of the very old where nothing here has to die. In this memory, Connor is trying to identify the names of constellations, but I am not listening. I am tired of things with names. I am looking behind me in the night, again taking bits of the past and keeping them here in this city to find when I go home. Giving up a little of the now to come back to it one day in the future.

"This will all be a memory of a memory then, huh?" Connor laughs.

"Something like that," I tell him. He tells me I am crazy. He asks me what I am afraid of, and I tell him everything: the stars, the present, him.

"Me?" he asks. I tell him yes, and he asks why. The truth is that it is because he expects me to be here with him when I would rather be far



away from *now*, remembering this.

"But when you go home, will you be happy, or will you just want to be back here in Italy?" I don't answer. I'm realizing his point: for me, home is anywhere I am not.

When I leave here, I do not say goodbye. None of it feels real, too much like a dream. On the flight back, the flight attendant insists on yet another glass of red wine-- again?-- and *It's a Wonderful Life* repeats itself on the tiny screen in front of me. I lose track of time, pass out on the person beside me, catch sight of someone between the seats in front of me that I swear looks just like Barbara until I realize that it is nothing but a bald man in the military. It is then I realize what it is happening, that the moment I backed away from Barbara in the hospital room, I had begun stretching away from that moment like a rubber band, the elasticity of time traveling with me across the Atlantic into Italy, through Spain and France, the tension, the momentum of having left her increasing with every moment. In every moment that passed, the strain of Barbara's absence increased a bit more, the inevitable return evermore a truth of, a conclusion to, a narrative of running away. What I am experiencing on this plane is the violent undoing of the past three months. I am returning not just to America, but to Barbara, to reality, not just life-as-it-was, but life-as-it-is. Things are happening too fast, time is speeding up. I will ride in a car with my sister and will feel as though no time at all has passed since that moment when I left here. But this not true. I did leave, and time did pass. Things happened. It is not time that has been on pause—not Barbara, nor death, not reality-- but me.

At Christmas dinner, we will sit around a table and my father will make a toast, not only to my arrival home but to those whom have left. I will find that I am confused, scared. I don't believe him. I am looking at her chair which is not here and I am staring at the door. I am still waiting for her to arrive.

## Oh, San Francisco

His head was hung low. His black hair reached over to barely cover his eyes. He didn't move; he didn't speak. It was odd sitting next to him. Our thighs were pressed together, not intimately. Our backs rested on the blue seats and with every jolt of the train, a puff of white would come out of the fabric. Just like that, it would shoot into the air. I stared at it in disgust, hoping it wasn't anything contagious.

"It's hobo dandruff." I turned my head towards the deep voice, surprised it was coming from the black haired man.

"What?" I had no idea what he was talking about.

"The white particles coming off of the BART seats-It's hobo dandruff."

Mouth open wide, I stared at his serious expression. His eyes glittered as a smirk snuck across his face and I glared at him.

"Ha-ha, very funny." I spent the rest of the ride in silent terror, wondering what in the world that white stuff could be.

## The Little Things

"Fuckin' immigrants."

And then a pause. Never a hesitation.

"I don't give a god-damn whether they're here legally or not. No jobless beaner's gonna ruin my neighborhood. They're not movin' the fuck next door to squat out fifty kids."

"Louie, how about taco trotter. I'm tired of beaner. And blame the pope for the kids. I bet they'd wear condoms if they could. Shit, I bet just thinking about birth control could give the Virgin Mary a miscarriage." Jesus, the shit I put up with for family.

"Call them whatever the fuck you want. They aren't moving in."

"Louie, welcome to America. If they have the money to move here, they're going to."

"But they're fucking fence jumpers." Louie could be so poetic.

"Money talks bud. If they pay the rent and don't wreck the house their landlord couldn't give two shits."

"Well I'll call him and see."

"Don't bother. He called last week to give me a heads up."

"So he does know that they shouldn't be here," Louie said.

"Nope. He knows your condition. And your love of minorities."

"I'll welcome them when they get here."

"No Louie, you'll stay the fuck the inside."

"Fine. I'll only go out and size them up."

"No. What part of stay the fuck inside says that?" Sometimes I could leave Louie speechless. "Last time you went out to greet our new neighbors you booted their Chihuahua into the fire hydrant. They weren't even Mexican."

"Little fuckin' Taco Bell dog. What was I supposed to think?" Out of Louie's mouth, it was a genuine question.

The little things that got me through the day.

My brother was unemployed—but he was handicapped. Louie was brained by our father with a Babe Ruth sized Louisville Slugger when we were eight.

Dad was fat, racist and unemployed—one of Port Richmond's proudest sons. Blue Collar Comedy after a weeklong meth binge. Legend goes he rented a U-Haul truck to move his cousin Dock, the crooked Deacon, out of town and never returned it. He stripped the paint with turpentine and when the U-Haul guys came looking for their truck, Big Lou spat some shit about the porch monkeys robbing him at the Sunoco. Our mom would hawk fruit, veggies and, come playoffs, Phillies and Eagles shit brought in from China out of the back of the truck. They cut through the side streets in a big square from Somerset St and Aramingo Ave to Westmorland St and Richmond. They weren't real popular with the factory workers and Union boys, but the parish knew who they were.

Then the Puerto Ricans moved in and bought a van without rust scars burnt across the body. They sold better shit cheaper than my parents. Ma sucked her hate in with her gut.

"Those bastards think they can run all over my neighborhood, selling us outta our truck. That's not how good people do. A good family wouldn't do that."

Dad inherited the house on the corner of Cedar and Ann Sts and hustled bets down the block at Fat Mom's bar. Big Lou smelled like a stagnant bus stop, the kind that drove people to wait in the rain. Mosquitoes thought twice before biting but elected to lay their eggs in his permanently damp hair.

Louie, me, and the doughy Tacconelli boys were playing baseball at the abandoned Coke factory off Somerset when Lou, drunk off rum and the coke syrup that dripped from sugar-rusted tanks all along the outfield, tried to give Louie, our catcher, a scare. For a big laugh he was going to skim Louie's cap with a bat. That's what he said afterward, anyway.

Big Lou rolled up to the plate and glided back toward Louie before taking his swing. Our bases were cut in the ground; after Louie got smacked home, the stick-scratched outline of the plate filled with his blood.

Louie's brain swelled up and he lost an eighth of his I.Q. The docs said he'd live and think right once his brain shrunk but he couldn't go it



alone; his mood swings would be too volatile and sudden for him to handle on his own. He got his head back over time but he never quite relearned reason or empathy.

Ma chucked Big Lou out on his ass. To make money, our mom ran Lou out of Fat Mom's and made his betting book into her career. Lou gambled to get a load on; Ma never drank and waited 'til a drunk fell down and lifted himself an inch off the floor to whisk him into an open seat at her card table.

"You were Lou's favorite, Eric. He said it was like looking in a more handsome mirror." And she'd laugh and the hate would come untucked and creep around her belly.

A few months ago, I was doing community service after my twenty third birthday party at the CVS got broken up when I heard from one of the paroled guys at the "Dignified Diner" program that Big Lou got stabbed lurking around Temple looking to pinch wallets from the international students.

Our high school couldn't do shit for Louie. Too angry for the special kids and too fucked for the rest of us, he'd hang on 'til he got a headache. Fifth grade took two years and seventh took three; Louie pissed his teachers off or wore them out. He blew his last chance in tenth grade. Miss Dulraney spun to his desk and asked him why his head was down. Without a word, he yanked her arm out of its socket. The school district settled and carted her sunshine ass to a charter school in Bucks County.

Kathy opened the spigot for Louie's hate.

"If they can teach foreigners English," she'd say, "they can get my Louie his services."

The little things.

I lived with Louie. He owned the house, not me. Big Lou bequeathed it to him as an apology. Ma reminded me that he owned a house every time I saw her. I owned a guitar. Louie loved the word bequeathed because it sounded like bequeefed when he slurred it.

"Eric. I gotta have a drink." Louie's eyes crossed. When he got a headache, it looked like they were trying to escape a trash compactor.

“Okay, buddy. What’ll it be today?”

“Rum. Strong rum and coke.” Louie was real in touch with dad’s drink.

“Coming right up. Hit the couch man, I’ll bring it right over.”

Jacquin’s Rum was distilled in sugar sweetened gas tanks in the heart of Kingston, Jamaica. But it was cheap. Louie’s disability check wasn’t too much and he insisted he buy his own liquor. I dropped some fishy ice into a cup of Coke and drowned it in rum.

Louie’s fort was the holey couch we picked up on Craig’s List. It had bugs but we bombed them out. Then they climbed into the reeking grey carpet so we tore it up and walked on the yellow foam subfloor.

“And let’s see what’s on TCM, alright?” We lived in shit but of course we had cable. Louie’s brain might’ve swelled again if he couldn’t watch Turner Classic Movies.

“Hurry up, they always start at eleven. It’s 10:59.” Like fuckin’ clockwork. He was like a helpless grandpa, except drunk and brain damaged.

“Oh good shit today Louie. Mr. Smith Goes to Washington and White Heat are on back to back.” Thank god. Louie loved the classics enough to keep him quiet for a few hours. He was my brother and all but these good deeds were damn tiring.

Louie kept the drapes cracked an inch; he liked the concentrated jab of sunlight. I thought it looked like the elevator doors into heaven had jammed.

“First of the month Louie, I’m off to run my errands. Stay inside when the new guys move in next door. Whoever—”

“—or whatever,” Louie said.

“Sure. Whoever they are, can you wait for me to go say hi?” I’m the golden-boy, always trying to keep peace.

“Fuck you, it’s my house.”

“I’ll buy you Captain. Or Bacardi.” Bargaining was usually my best bet.

“Deal.”



The first of the month meant a few things:

Louie got his disability check. Louie felt like a big man with his check, ready to grab life by the balls. He never used his advantage to get some training. Louie could've built a career but he just squeezed and twisted 'til life pulled free.

The first also meant I could refill Louie's prescriptions. I stopped at CVS for the tranquilizers. They were there to steady him when his mood swung from 'border hopper' racist to closeted Klansman at a pride parade. They were tic-tac sized and white, with a small 'e' pressed into each pill. On the way out, I always grabbed a bottle of Excedrin and a box of Sudafed.

After CVS, it was off to get Louie's Tylox from Gene Neumann's Druggist. It catered to old people; there were piss pads and toilet cushions on every shelf. Neumann was a Jew but plastered his name on the storefront to draw in superstitious Catholics. He knew me and Louie from when we were kids; we ran a little delivery route for him in high school. I got my start picking off extra Xanax and Percoset before we stopped at St. Mary's home; never could take too many, just enough to turn over for pocket money. Neumann was a decent guy; he'd hear me talk about Louie bent up like a croissant and slip an extra half month's worth of Tylox.

Ah, the little things.

I stopped at McDonald's and ordered a Doublestack and fries. I ducked into the bathroom and put Louie's extra Tylox—a bit of Tylenol coating oxycodone—in a baggie and pocketed it.

I slipped one in my lunch on the way to Jerry's.

"Hey man," Jerry's eyes traced the ceiling trim down the hallway, "uh, come on in. Yeah, that's good. Knock softer next time. I've got great hearing." His neck bent up and I could see tattooed hands gripping his collarbones.

"How you doing?"

"It was a good month. Always, uh, looking to do better. You know?" At each breath, he rolled and unrolled his hoodie sleeve.

"How are prices?" I cut right to business. Jerry's obsessively

organized apartment hit me in a rough way and the Tylox was only starting to hum. His couch had all matching cushions and the end tables weren't glossed by a film of Raid.

"The same. \$3 apiece for the Ty and \$7 for the tranqs." Jerry's voice dropped out when he said a price. After three years of this, I can pretty much read his lips.

"Word. I got to use your table." I opened the Excedrin container and dumped the fat little aspirin on the table.

"He still doesn't know?" Every month was like a variation on the same theme. I dropped by on the first, switched the pills and left with drug store's bottles.

"Nope, these have little E's on them too. And the Tylox are Smartie sized and red, like Sudafed. He takes a handful of them with his bottle."

I counted my cash: \$210 for the tranqs and \$180 for the Tylox.

I liked to stop and see Ma when my pockets were full. After Louie got the house she decided that she didn't have to stick around. If I remember right she said Louie was my job. Ma moved into the apartment above Fat Mom's.

"Hello, Ma? What you doin'? Takin' a nap?"

"Quit hollerin' at me, damnit. What do you want?"

"Can't your loving son say hello?"

"I'm not giving you money."

I flashed her my wallet. Ma looked like a confused snake, all unhinged for nothing. I couldn't even try to hide a smile.

"Well look at you. Big fuckin' payday? I hope you didn't steal that from poor Louie. Just cause he's got a house, you know, doesn't mean he's got money to spare. He's my angel."

"I didn't. And why don't you come see your little angel?"

"So you come here accusin' me of things? Fuck the hellos then. Come out and say it."

"I'm not sayin' shit. You haven't been around. That's a fact. If you don't like it, change it."

"You're just like your father." Here we go. "Always thinking he knew what was best."

"Yeah, that's exactly what's happening here. Go ahead and accuse your honest, hard working son of being a degenerate dickbag like dad. I work for Mr. Neumann. He understands I gotta take care of Louie."

"That's the same job you've had forever."

"Please, I don't drop off deliveries to the bastards in life's self checkout lane anymore. I got responsibilities. I gotta ensure that the right prices are paid for the pharmaceuticals he gets."

"Sounds like a cashier to me. At least you work for a honest man. A Jew but a good one."

"Christ, Ma."

"Watch your fuckin' tongue. This is a Catholic house."

"Over a bar."

"Jesus drank wine."

"Nice to see you too."

"Oh you're leaving so soon? Would you even care if I dropped dead tomorrow?"

If I knew, I would've answered her.

When I left our brick-front row home, a blank, white van had its side doors splayed open and boxes were flowing onto the curb outside. The sidewalk and the van were the same when I got back. I paused at the unattended boxes. Our shades were pulled tighter than when I left.

Louie was on the floor. The door hadn't even hit the spring stopper before he started yelling at me.

"Those fucking people. I said hello and they beat me. Those goddamn dirt-lips beat me." I flipped the working light switch and saw Louie yellowing into the foam. He was sputtering through a torn lip. His left eye was swollen shut and he was clutching his knees.

"I'll go talk to them." I couldn't take Louie's shit seriously with the spring's metallic thwop in the background.

"I'll call the goddamn police. The INS. These fucks are getting deported." He sounded like Daffy Duck.

I swallowed three Tylox and straddled the railing between the doors. Some black paint flecked onto my jeans. I smacked my neighbors cheap screen door and the plastic knock hung in the air.

All three men had the same flattened speed-bags under their eyes. Too tired to look tough, they still could've kicked my ass. They wore matching beige work suits with identical patches on top of hand sewn name tags: St. Martin's Catholic Church, a parish further up the North East.

The youngest guy, Andrew, couldn't have been much younger than me. Clemente looked near sixty. He had the same 'piss-it-all' look that Big Lou wore when I was a kid. Carlos stepped forward and we stuck our hands together.

"What the fuck did he do?"

"He hit my wife." Fuckin' Louie, tough as dad.

"He tried to grab her," Carlos rubbed his tit, "but she backed away. He got her in the eye."

"Jesus Christ, Louie," I sighed. A fucking woman.

"I'll pay; let's go to the damn hospital."

"No. We'll take care of her."

"Okay, whatever. She's your fuckin' problem. I'll go deal with mine. He won't bother you again." I started up the steps.

"The money." Carlos moved to the first step.

"For real? How the fuck do I know that she's going to a hospital?"

Andrew tapped the patch on his chest.

"Dude, that doesn't mean shit here."

"But you offered to help." Clemente spoke with the weight of respected age. All that honor thy father and mother bullshit was packed in tight. Fuckin' Catholics.

"No, I said I'd go to the hospital."

"To pay for the damages."

"Louie fuckin' hit your wife. I'd do it to move on. Fuck, man, I don't want to help your shit. I just don't want the cops here."

Clemente and Carlos held their ground. Andrew slipped a wide-



eyed look at me and mumbled a Hail Mary.

"And I guess you don't want that either."

"So give us money to help her and we're done. We know about his brain."

Carlos rapped on his head. "If you can keep him under control we can forget this." Carlos was trying to reason with me.

"Fuck, you just don't get it. How do I know you won't throw some ice on her face and get loaded on my dime?"

"I love her. She's the mother of my son. She can't see out her eye."

"Yeah? And what do I think when you're sitting here tomorrow morning sippin' 211 and playin' the guitar? I'm supposed buy that shit?"

Carlos spat on the sidewalk and backed down the steps. They stood in a half-circle around me and reached into their pockets.

"Oh shit. Just calm the fuck down. Fuck it, take the money." I winced and ducked my head into my sweatshirt when I heard metallic clinking.

Little silver crosses on link chains.

"Nada te turbe. Nada te espante. Todo se pasa. Dios no se muda. La paciencia todo lo alcanza. Quien a Dios tiene nada le falta. Sólo Dios basta."

Fuckin' prayers. I left \$100 on the bottom step and shuffled inside.

"Louie, you fucked up. You grabbed her tit?"

"My fuckin' mouth. Lookit' what they did to my mouth and that's what you got to say? I wanna call the police."

"If you call the cops, you get fucked too."

"So what? They'll go ruin their own country."

"Shit man, do whatever the fuck you want."

I walked into the kitchen and knocked a stack of cheese-crust paper plates on the floor. We hadn't had pizza in weeks. I heard the couch groan and Babes in Toyland demilitarized my brother. I grabbed the warped plastic bottle of Popov and a scum-ringed dish rag.

"Chin up, dickhead."

I smiled and poured the last of vodka on Louie's upper lip.

"Christ, Eric. That shit stings." The bleeding had stopped and the frayed pink edges looked like short unwound spools of raw sausage.

"Ah fuck. Shoon as I kin feel mawh 'ips, I cawll the 'olice."

"Like hell you will. Your eyes are redder than the devil's dick and your sweat is flammable. You call the cops; I'll wait by the door and apologize for your drunk ass."

Louie pitifully whipped the Jacquin's bottle across the room. Empty, it flopped off the humming TV screen. "Tomahrow, I'll cawll the cops. An' those burritos will 'e gone. The law is on my side."

I smacked the phone onto the floor behind the couch.

"Give me my 'uckin' 'ills." Louie bleated hopelessly.

He said it again and again. I walked into the kitchen and sat on our inherited dining room table. Me and Louie scribbled and cut all kinds of dirty words into it when we were kids. Our first 'fucks' and 'shits' kept the table in our family.

I grabbed the pill bottles from my pocket and filled my hand.

"Here are your goddamn pills." Enjoy the aspirin, asshole.

His brittle, red nails chipped and cracked on my palm.

"'bout 'uckin' time. That bitch's gonna get it, tomahrow."

Louie labored at each word; his drunk, tired tongue lashed his ground upper lip. A few pills rolled off his lip and started to melt on his chin.

"A drink?"

I opened another bottle of Jacquin's and poured Louie a cup. I didn't bother with ice or Coke. I stepped into the living room and squatted next to Louie on the couch.

"Tha's what I needed."

Louie sputtered. His eyes crossed and his brow clamped down. His throat backfired and he squeezed his sloppy tits.

I grabbed the phone while Louie cradled on his side. He shredded the foam floor. His gut bulged to the sky and dropped.

Louie flopped from his side to his stomach. I dialed 9 and 1.

He looked up. His mouth tried to warm and shape his grunts into words.

He threw up brown liquid. It smelled like bar's dumpster.

I hung up the phone and went to take a nap.

On the Last Day of the Month

I want to write something about a train  
that would be so metaphorical  
about looking out the window and watching  
a little girl who seems stranded at a station  
stop, and me reflecting about how I see  
myself in her round, strained eyes and  
summer squash skin, about my life pushing past  
me along with the herd of commuters and travelers  
who never stop long enough to realize their direction  
but I haven't been on a train in so long and  
our drive in the car wasn't nearly as maudlin  
no straight-track, ticket to nowhere imagery  
to grapple around, nothing steaming  
out the top or chugging past littered mud pits.

You picked me up, hit the mailbox  
yelled at the man in front of us for not  
stopping at the stop sign (I said, nobody  
stops at that stop sign) and we drove past  
the places I knew, it smelled like lake water,  
sweat and the inside of my mint tin  
I looked out the window and thought this  
moment in a poem, how the words might look  
sprawled across book paper the color of  
a sixty watt bulb beneath a lamp shade  
with a small wave of smoke and then we  
turned left and it started to rain, and I  
thought if only we were caught in a  
passenger car, among the thick saturated  
clamor, concentrated like frozen juice  
how meaningful all this would be.



Then we took the subway, it was  
dark outside and I told a joke  
about my friend who is engaged,

apparently, and living with the guy  
on a berry farm and it would take us  
two and a half days to get there from here,

if we were going the speed of a subway.  
You yawned and sipped your coffee because  
it was either very early or very late, but in any  
case we hadn't slept straight in six nights.  
I tried to close my eyes but the homeless man's  
greasy hair was spilling onto my lap and I didn't  
want my head to fall against your shoulder. You see,  
it was hot and stuffy, the backs of my legs were  
sticking to my denim pants and we were wearing  
our winter coats – I mean it was winter, outside, anyway,  
but down in the station it was a sauna and a  
boy band played cover songs and drummed  
on a cardboard box and people took videos with  
their phones, which we would later watch on the  
internet. I put on a dress and I wanted to be skinny  
then I came home to your bed late at night and you  
sank your corkscrew into the bottle and I wanted to lie  
back and do nothing but feel the softness of my  
feet against the blanket. Silly when we have to do things.  
I know I can't say things like

and honestly,  
I don't want to say that. It's ugly. Why is it so ugly?  
I want to delete it right now, in fact I think I will. Now  
there is a hole in my poem, a little gap where I could

place anything. Look at her,  
she's a dancer, I always wanted to  
be a dancer, I loved my ballet  
class so much and when I stamped  
my old worn shoes against the chalk  
on the hardwood floor so I wouldn't slip.

## An Angel Tries to Surprise Humans

You wouldn't think Heaven could be boring.  
You wouldn't think after seeing that place  
up there that I'd want to come here.  
But I find you humans to be  
funny little beings.  
I once saw a kid fall hard on concrete  
when their friend pulled out their chair.  
You all laughed. Why is it funny  
when someone hurts?  
You do that then cry endlessly  
when they are gone.  
I saw someone eating  
and food hit their shirt. Why is it  
a joke when someone slips up?  
I've seen the power of God a little bit.  
You come to someone's side  
when they can't be strong  
against that bully alone.  
You do things just because  
someone says you can't. You're daring.  
A lot of things that would shock me  
don't even bother you. You don't think  
you're lost but you go to war, leaving death  
everywhere, for things you don't understand.  
You think you know what you're doing  
but you doubt God's existence  
and mine. Faith is lost  
on so many of you. Then when life  
is almost over; you throw yourselves  
to the pulpit begging for the holy love  
only a doubted God can give.  
Like I said,

I find you funny. You little specks  
wasting your money on gambling.  
That is why I am standing here  
on a low roof top  
in Atlantic City, New Jersey,  
right next to the busy boardwalk,  
a daily carnival of simple  
emotional beings.

Out of all the emotions I've seen,  
what I crave from you most  
is surprise. But today it seems  
hard to come by. So I have a plan.  
Standing up, I stretch my wings.  
I smile, looking down  
to the crowded bustling walkway.  
But ...

Not one of you is looking up.  
Not one of you has your eyes open.  
*Are you all blind to me?*

*Is it true you've lost sight of the important?*  
*Is it fathomable you really lost sight of the divine?*

I thought just maybe I could surprise you.  
Maybe I could teach you how to believe again.  
But no,

only a child looked up.  
A little girl with pink bows in her hair  
looked up to me and tried to tell her mom.  
But, like everyone else,  
her mother didn't care.



## Slide: A Beginning

The three hour bus ride from Dublin to Galway gave me time to think. But I didn't. Instead I stared. At the cattle grazing right next to the road. Brown and black and white spotted. Farmer's tags clipped to some of their ears. Calves mixed in with the cows—looking back at me with big, brown eyes. There were horses in back yards. Superior to the cows in grace, build, vibrancy. Too cool to look at the bus as it wobbled through the narrow lanes.

I was getting a headache from being on the wrong side of the road, and from watching the bus get closer to trees and dips in the road.

Didn't care.

I saw little bits of home in the flashing scenery. It was a wilder version of home. Still lots of farms and open land, but everything was bigger. Drenched with colors. With rain. With an untamed strangeness. Instead of fences, there were stone walls about four feet tall. The same walls have been in place for hundreds of years. Cemented together by mud and age. They didn't seem to keep the animals in, but they divided the land into a quilt of uneven green squares. There are big-branched trees that aren't confined into spaces, or placed for purpose. Trees are there because they want to be there.

It was a fast bus ride.

When the bus got to Galway, all of the students staying in Menlo Park Apartments were dropped off first. We met Martha, the apartment manager. Within a week, Martha's name was usually accompanied by the phrase: "Fuck Martha! Let's rage!" Martha didn't like Americans. We didn't like Martha for sending the hulking security guard, Sean, after us every night we tried to party.

There was one other girl in my apartment when I arrived—Paula. About 4'8", cutest person I had ever seen. And from Spain. I talked too fast for her, and she spoke too disjointed for me. Our first meeting was awkward smiles, a handshake, forced laughter, and a relieved departure to separate rooms.

I needed to walk to the supermarket to get food. Tesco was

supposed to be a five minute walk from the first round-about. But I went right instead of left and ended up on the noisy highway bridge above the River Corrib. This did not remind me of home. Cars were screaming by; swirling up a wind that pulled my hair. I turned around. I couldn't find the path I used to get onto the main street. I didn't have a phone yet. I started walking the other way, hoping I would find some previously unknown landmark, or at least the supermarket.

The next day I Skyped my dad and cried. My roommate wasn't there yet, and everyone else seemed so *cool*. They smoked all the time. Which I know I shouldn't think is cool, but I did. Althea and Joey and Tim would stand outside the apartments like real grown-up people. Laughing and smoking and talking about what they were going to do in Ireland. I felt like smoking gave them this connection. An adult connection. And I was going to look like a kid with my sneakers and messy hair and asthma (so I couldn't even fake belonging and smoke). I sat at my desk, and stared out my window. It overlooked the entire courtyard. Perfect for spying on the people I was sure wouldn't want to be friends with me. Tim saw me looking, waved, and yelled at me to come downstairs.

I tried to think of an excuse. I wasn't ready to meet people and make friends. But instead, I attempted a smile and waved back. I pulled on my sorority jacket with the nickname Weather Girl embroidered on it, and ran outside.

We sat on railings and cement, talking the awkward first-meeting chatter that encompasses everything—where do you go to school? What's your major? Do you play any sports? Pamela introduced herself so confidently, and I was certain I wouldn't like her.

"I go to UNF and I'm an English Lit major. But I really love to write. I'm going to be a writer someday. I always try to keep journals on me. Hopefully this trip will give me lots of material." She flipped her hair over one shoulder and adjusted her black plastic glasses. Joey raised his eyebrows and tried to hide a snicker.

"I like to write too," I don't know why I volunteered that.

"What do you like to write about? Do you want to be a writer?"

Novelist?"

"Uhm. I don't know. Probably not."

I think I'm scared of writing. I sit down with my computer, or with my notebook when I decide that I'm cool and hipster-esque, write two sentences and stop. To be good at writing, you have to dig into every space within your heart and your brain. Little worms of thought and idea and emotion get ripped out and immortalized on the screen or piece of paper. And then these worms have to sound good. Look pretty. Mean something. And there is so much work to make these worms into words.

My pop-pop would always talk to me about writing and say, "It's something you have to do every day, you know? You can't get lazy about it. You have to work at it. You have to write every single day. Even when you don't feel like it."

My dad saying, "Why don't you write as much anymore?"

"I don't know."

"Well, if it's really what you want to do, you should probably get on that."

My mom asking, "Can I read something you wrote?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because." Because I'm not good enough. Because I don't want to share these things I go through. Because I'm selfish.

Maybe I'm too selfish to be good at writing. I'm good at reading. My book intake per month is astronomical, per year it becomes almost funny. I devour other people's experiences, emotions, quests for finding the important things within themselves. I want to know all of this, without having to share. I'm the kindergartener who won't let the other kids play with her doll.

I have a hard time writing about Ireland. I was scared to write about Ireland while I was there because it meant that my trip was going to end. I'm still scared to write about Ireland. What if how I write down things doesn't compare to the real thing? How can I write about something I can't define?

“Weather Girl!” Jack yelled at me from the other side of the beer garden. He was growing out his beard again. That, and his black shaggy hair made him look like a bear. O’Connell’s was crowded. People pressed up against each other, creating more heat than the space heaters sitting next to each picnic table. Jack was waving. I pushed through the strangers while trying to hold my pint of Guinness. It was Arthur’s Day, and illegal to drink anything but Guinness products. Maybe not quite illegal, but it seemed that way when I watched an American order Budweiser and get yelled at by everyone else in the garden. Better than the looks of disdain the girl who asked for ice water received.

Jack grabbed my elbow and pulled me out of the crush of people, spilling my beer on his hand.

“We thought we lost you!”

“Stop. I was just on the other side. You guys knew where I was.” I tried to find a napkin.

“But you’re so short. Sometimes I think we should find you a baby sitter.”

“Ha, ha.” I tried to keep from smiling but it was too hard not to. Even though I acted like I was tired of the boys calling me short, I wasn’t. It was their way of showing that they care about me.

That’s embarrassing to admit.

We were still at O’Connell’s hours later. The band started playing *Slide* by the Goo Goo Dolls. Pamela and I were dancing. She was turning her head to the side, and her hair kept floating out behind her and hitting strangers in the face. We couldn’t stop laughing. Joey and Tim found us in the crowd. They smelled like cigarettes and beer and sweat. Joey started singing, and Tim would join in on the chorus. He stole my hands from Pam and stared spinning me in circles, calloused fingers gripping mine. My sides hurt from laughing, and my cheeks were stretched from smiling.

I don’t like writing these memories down. Writing them down takes away the shininess they have in my mind. That sparkly-dream quality that highlights the best memories. Now someone else knows about them, so they’re not all mine anymore. And no one can feel the exact same



way I felt when these things were happening. My friends that write are so honest. They share achingly personal moments, poignant with emotion. They don't edit themselves or hide what they're thinking from the reader. I always hide. I don't want to delve deeper into myself to really figure out why I'm scared. I don't want people to judge me. To judge my words. I wrote only once when I was in Ireland. It was the second Monday in Galway; a group of us decided to go to the Cliffs of Moher. This is when I realized I loved Ireland more than anything else. There was this pounding in my heart. I couldn't stop looking out the windows of the tour bus. Never have I fallen in love with anything the way I fell in love with Ireland that day. I want to live there. I would give up seeing my family every day for a country where rain doesn't diminish beauty, but enhances it. A place that I would never take for granted.

I want to write about all these good things—the beauty and overwhelming happiness. But I can't say all the things I want to because while I'm writing about the good things, I'm thinking about the bad.

Words flow so fast for the bad things.

Who wants to relive those things?

Tim crumpling down into his depression plays on repeat in my head when I write.

Getting drunk and referring to himself in the third person.

Refusing to look at me, the sweat on his face reflecting light from the club sign. Laughing when I ask if there's anything I can do. Standing out in the cold, speaking about death like it's an easy thing. Rain matting his hair and trickling down my ear.

Sitting at the Dáil Bar, elbows on the table, hands cradling my head as I stare at the couple in the booth across from us. Not listening to Lindsay and Tim talking about school. I'm thinking about being lucky. About being too lucky. How many good things can happen in just a few months? And then Lindsay is making faces at me, forcing my attention to change, pulling me back into the conversation.

Tim is talking about things that take me a minute to understand. He's scratching his beard and rolling up the sleeves of soft flannel.

"It was weird. Monday was a bad day. I was standing on the bridge near the cathedral, and thinking about how much I base my happiness on the people I become dependent on. Like, you know how I get upset if Jordan doesn't want to hook up, or she's ignoring me or whatever? Stuff like that. And I was thinking about how easy it would be if I just jumped off the bridge. Like, I was thinking about trajectory and shit and how far I would have to jump so that everything would just be over." His navy eyes plead with us. Willing an understanding I don't know how to give.

Words. Words. Words. Rocks that are hitting me over and over. He wasn't just contemplating suicide. He had it all figured out. Knew what he was going to do. Broke me into jagged pieces of metal that I keep trying to reconfigure into something resembling what it used to be. Him saying "I mean wouldn't it be better? To get out of my fucking head?" Lindsay saying things that don't mean anything. Sounds of comfort that aren't enough. Me sitting in a pub holding a beer in shaking apart hands. Liquid that sloshes onto my jeans. I can't say anything. I want to scream. I want to cry. I want to hit him. I'm thinking about Allyson. Someone else who thought about suicide. Who figured out what to do. And now I'm looking back on Allyson's funeral. A fifteen year old me, snottng all over the place and all I can focus on as I look into the open casket at her lips because they're so blue and so not right.

And I'm back in the pub still spilling beer on the floor, still refusing to look at the boy next to me. I'm angry. I'm so angry I could tear apart the wooden floors plank by plank and not feel the splinters under my nails.

How could someone so beautiful not want to live?

If he doesn't want to live...

Worrying every day about someone you love. Not being able to sleep because they haven't texted you back.

What wants to write about these things? Who wants to remember?

We decided to go to the Aran Islands one weekend. To be more accurate, Lindsay and I decided that everyone should go to the Aran

Islands one weekend. If Linds and I didn't organize trips, no one would ever go anywhere. It was supposed to be all of our friends going, but it ended up just being Lindsay and me, plus the boys.

Leaving the apartment complex that Saturday morning was a process. The bus that would take us to the ferry was going to leave at 8:45, and we needed to leave Menlo by 8:15. Of course everyone was late, and we had to run the miles into town to catch the bus.

The waves rocked the ferry from side to side. Jack had fallen asleep next to me, his head on my shoulder. Everyone was quiet.

The only way to see all of Inis Mor, the biggest island, is to bike. We wanted to stop and take pictures every ten minutes. The ocean never left us. You could smell it in the breeze even if you couldn't see it. The sun heated up everything; the grass and the road and the animals. A warm summer smell followed us. The road circled the outside of the island, guiding us past thatch-roofed cottages, small inns, sweater shops, and sheep. Sheep everywhere. Splashed with the pink and blue dyes of the farmers on the island. They roamed. Wandering onto the road and meandering after our bikes. We slowed down to a wiggle when we came across four big cattle standing on the road. They stared at us as we weaved by, trying to avoid the massive hooves and tails, swatting at our faces.

After two hours, we reached the cliffs. We left our bikes in a visitors' lot and hiked the rest of the way. There were these big stone steps etched into the grass of the hill. Pebbles shook loose every time my sneakers stepped up. Two of Jack's friends, Doug and Tate were making jokes and throwing the pebbles at each other.

There aren't words for the cliffs, but I can try. I'm trying to share.

The steps end and plateau onto a grassy flat. The grass stretches for a while until it becomes stone and rock again at the edges of the cliffs. Tourists are everywhere. Sitting or standing. Talking and taking pictures and reading. Languages float with the breeze. One word in every fifteen is English. I even saw a boy writing. He had dark hair.

Sprawled out on the grass with a notebook. He kept pushing the fringe out of his eyes and squinting against the sun.

The group of us walked across the grass, taking it in big strides. Anxious to see the ocean again. The sun was hitting off it, reflecting against the grey stone and white caps of the waves. I inched out a little bit farther until I thought the wind would snatch me off the ground, and then I laid down to inch forward a little more. The rocks scratched my stomach through my jacket, and the next day I noticed cuts on my hands. Lindsay got down next to me. We could hear the roar of the water, and taste the salt in the air.

One of my favorite pictures from my time in Ireland is of Lindsay and me lying down at the very edge of the cliffs. We're both laughing and our hair is all tangled together. You can see the water hundreds of feet below us, crashing against the cliffs.



---

## I Wonder if God Modeled Boys after Books

I wonder if God modeled boys after books  
Strong and unbending like a tight leather binding.  
Even with tears and wear, they can hold it together.  
Detailed and complex in spots like the design of  
Their facial hair and right to the point in others  
Like their young, professional skinny ties.  
Only read on page at a time or skim and  
Miss too much to understand. Get caught  
Up in the details and you are done.  
The table of contents, his bone structure.  
An Idea of what he is about but if you don't look beyond  
His inner workings will always be a mystery.  
Wrinkled pages, worn like the dry skin of his palm  
Bend his corners, he will only gain character.  
In your arms, he is firm but smooth with a  
Comfort you have come to know as your own.  
Like his name, the title doesn't define but  
Gives him something to be distinguished by.  
Unlike a book you can't brush him off  
And expect him to be there years down the road  
Invest in his words. Appreciate his marks,  
His imperfections, black splotches on what  
Was once pure, the things that make him come to life.

---

Marred With Modern Scars

I want to write a sonnet, lyrically woven tapestry  
But my mind is a patchwork of pornography  
Crude, foul, uncensored  
The grit of reality  
Intrudes

I want to write of foliage and fauna  
Apricot buds puckering to the dew atop olive stems  
Honey suckle offering its golden nectar  
Stalks of almond wheat swaying to Beethoven's "Für Elise"

But the words turn sour, corrupted by the ink they turn  
To thin lines of blanche powder cut by feigning hands  
To fogged windows, groping flesh, faked moans  
To knuckles, scarred from purging vile

I want to write of oceans and seas  
Waves climaxing together, celadon orgasms  
Algae spotted anchors carving into the champagne sand  
Ahab's voice echoing vengeance from the cold cobalt depths

But it turns to pools of acid,  
To tears of the widow snaking down a pallid cheek  
To fathers, the stench of Jameson, slice of the airborne buckle  
To scalpels inserting synthetic globs of silicone into carved flesh

I want to write of forests and woods  
Emerald canopies, the roof upon a sacred world  
Wise philosopher elms, yawning as the Warbler flicks his gold tipped  
wings  
The last auburn leaf, crumbling as Frost sings carols in the distance

But it fades, corrosive words transform

To babies, stillborn, fragile ashen faces  
To moments alone, fingers appeasing the lust for pleasure

To 18th century buildings of hand carved stone, tagged with ineligible  
spray paint

I want to write of the sky, the heavens  
Azure pastures of air, smeared with silken cream clouds

Apollo piercing past the ebony cashmere, studded with sallow freckles  
Sun dipping, dripping hues of plum, amaranth, terracotta, down the hillside

But the watercolor washes wayward,  
To ACDC blaring as he pries pale unwilling legs apart  
To ignoring the wedding ring, rubbing a palm against dark denim  
To mahogany pews, nodding heads condemning the nonbelieving sinner

I want to write of me, myself  
Almond eyes, flecked with gold, perched atop heavy cordovan bags of  
fatigue  
Carnelian red lips, impish dimples and thin lines mapping the trails of  
laughter  
Creamy Y shaped scar next to constellation of freckles

Grasping at a vague vignette of the world's beauty  
Like an ashen memory fading at my fingertips  
The harsh reality clawing at my back  
Beckoning my eyelids to open  
To drink deep the sickly red wine of today's pain

---

## Tarpon Springs

"With a body like that, you're going to marry a rich man!" The frail woman rasped from the doorway.

"Don't say that, Virginia, she's too skinny"

I stood awkwardly, not knowing what to do with my arms.

"No, no Adelia, skinny is innny right now! The boys love a girl that looks good in anything." The woman's attention shifted, "Adelia, did you bring me my lotto tickets? And introduce me to this beauty, wouldja?!"

"Virginia, this is my granddaughter, Gemma. She's visiting"

"Well, it's a pleasure. Come on in, you sexy ladies!"

My Mimi looked at me as if to say, see, I told you she was a character. Virginia put her foot in the doorframe to prop it open. An amazing feat considering the only thing holding up her bony frame was the four legs of her walker.

A paisley nightie hung from her body.

"Come on in" she rasped. She led us into the kitchen. She sat down and immediately sparked a cigarette. "Bert doesn't like it when I smoke." She winked at us. "I like to smoke, so I say screw him!"

Her body convulsed into coughing fit. Virginia sputtered and hacked. I looked at my grandmother nervously. She seemed concerned. When the coughing subsided she took another drag. An ashtray filled with butts served as the table's centerpiece. A pack of Marlboro Golds was propped on the lip of the ashtray.

"Adelia, how's Jesse?"

"He's good," she answered. "He has a little bit of cold, but he's fine"

"Good, good." Virginia took another drag. She turned her attention to me.

"Your grandmother doesn't like it when I say a certain word."

"Which word?"

"Yeah, it's a Portuguese word, I'm going to whisper it in your ear so Adelia doesn't hear it," She grinned, and leaned towards me.

"The word is..." She whispered it into my ear. I giggled and



glanced at my Mimi.

“You know what that means, right?”

“Yes”

“Adelia doesn’t like it, because it’s rude.... It means penis right? Or balls?” Virginia placed her lit cigarette on the ashtray. She yelled, “Is it penis or balls, Adelia? I can never remember!”

I looked at my small Mimi, so bound by Portuguese, Catholic customs. She was shaking her head. I could tell that she was trying to keep a smile from crossing her lips. She had to remain firm.

Virginia paused, a wild look in her eyes. “*CARALHO!!!!*” The word exploded out of her.

My Mimi flinched.

Virginia started laughing, a lascivious cackle.

I stared at the both of them, at once amused and wildly uncomfortable.

We left Virginia’s house when the Florida sun was beating down mercilessly. We walked silently around the corner, the hum of mowers playing bass with our pedestrian percussion.

Papi was asleep in the open garage, in a tattered lawn chair, a worn Tampa Bay cap shielding his face from the sun.

I decided to take a nap, inside.

It was one of those days. One of those humidity envelopes that blanket everyone in an invisible hug, and coat everyone not fortunate enough to have AC in a film of sweat. I stood in front of the full length mirror in my underwear, trying to determine whether my arms had gotten any bigger.

I called home.

“Mom, I want to come home”

“Not until you’re better, sweetie.”

The response felt like a cool clip to the chest. I felt my throat harden, my eyes pricked. “What do you mean?” I said this as a conversational formality.

“You know what I mean, honey.”

"I don't like it here, I'm tired, I'm sick of church and we all have to eat according to Papi's appetite!"

"Gemma..."

"That's like every three hours!"

"Gem, they're elderly. Do your best to follow suit, and don't make trouble."

I heard the exhaustion in her voice. I felt hysteria rising in my chest like a bubble. I wanted to end the conversation before the bubble surfaced. "Mom, I have to go now," I choked out. I bit my lower lip in an attempt to control my voice.

"Ok."

"Ok." I parroted.

"Gemma?"

"Yeah, Mom." I managed.

"I really do love you, we all do..."

I pressed "end" on the cordless phone and threw it on the bed. I hugged my knees to my chest and waited for the room to stop spinning. At 5pm I joined Mimi and Papi in the kitchen. Dinner that night was rice and baked fish. Dessert was fresh cut fruit and sugar-free pudding. We passed the dishes rhythmically as the 5'oclock news droned in front of us.

I was getting used to the routine. Regular meals like clockwork because Papi "gets so cranky when he's hungry." Mimi would always add with a sigh that, "he's always hungry." Regular walks, weekly trips to Sam's Club, church and the flea market were second nature.

Retirement community living wasn't so bad. Sometimes I'd wander aimlessly through the cul-de-sacs. I'd ride Papi's bike through the winding developments, sometimes spotting an alligator in one of the manmade ponds. The neighbors liked to talk to me. Like Joe, the ex-NYPD cop who saw a baby get cooked over Thanksgiving because the parents were on acid and mistook their only child for turkey dinner. He'd tried earnestly to describe the details; I tried in earnest to forget them. His bushy caterpillar eyebrows had danced animatedly as he told his story with a strong New York accent.

The president of the residential community had visited. He asked if I was on spring break. I told him yeah, something like that. I tried to keep a low profile, to observe normal human behavior and imitate it. I knew Mimi was worried. I knew she lit candles and prayed hard for me. I tried not to give her reason to pray any harder.

The next day, over breakfast, Mimi shared, "Virginia is in the hospital."

"What?" I exclaimed, mouth full of oatmeal.

"She fell down last night."

I swallowed my oatmeal, and regretted it when my throat filled with burning. "Is she ok?"

"Adelia, where's my toast!"

"Jesse, it's right in front of you..." Mimi sighed. "Bert called this morning, to tell us"

"Oh...." I paused. "Should we go visit?"

"Maybe bring some flowers." She traced the floral designs on her paper napkin with a long fingernail. "Maybe we go after lunch."

"Ok, sounds good."

By the time lunchtime rolled around, I was in full sunbather mode. Vegetating, I imagined my body as a solar battery, every skin cell a solar cell, eating up the UV rays. I'd found NPR on the radio and was listening to a story about some spy who beguiled the enemy with card tricks or something. He'd escaped and it was a big deal. I looked at my hipbones, two peaks with a sloping plain between them. Bodies were so strange. I was grateful for the screened-in patio, for the privacy this backyard afforded me. I felt safe, safe and calm. If I could design a heaven it would have looked like this: sunshine, tall fences and hipbones. As long as I stayed by myself, I could concoct realities in my imagination. They were uninterrupted stretches of possibility. They repaired the paper cuts that the actual world peppered my skin with. Individually, these nicks were repairable, but the aggregate sum was bleeding me out.

"Gemma."

I opened a bleary eye. Mimi and Papi were standing over me,

blocking the sun.

"Do you still want to come to the hospital, to visit Virginia?"

Mimi's hands were clasped in front of her. She was wearing lipstick.

I really didn't want to go. I got up anyway, threw on a dress and splashed water on my face.

On the way to the hospital, we stopped at a Publix. Mimi bought flowers, lotto tickets, and a card. I picked out a balloon. Papi puttered along behind us and pulled out his wallet at the checkout. He was wearing a polo shirt tucked into his pants. He seemed more alert than usual.

It took us a while to find her room at the hospital. We started in the wrong wing, but eventually made our way to the second floor. Room 205. We entered, offerings in tow, like the Three Kings of Orient. I held the smiley balloon loosely and it trailed behind me, bobbing optimistically.

At first I didn't see her. She was so small; the massive bed seemed to swallow her completely. Her complexion so pale she blended with the bed sheets. Bert stood by her side, a worn, patient look on his face. Joe the ex-cop was there, with his chubby wife.

"Friends!" The rasp sounded labored. Virginia stretched out a bony arm and grabbed onto me. Her skin was soft and warm. I could see blue veins in her arms. I was surprised at the strength of her grip. With her other arm she motioned at Mimi. "Did you..." She wheezed. "Didja bring..." wheeze. "...my lotto tickets?"

Mimi smiled. Bert shook his head.

"Good...I'm feelin'....lucky." She grinned at Mimi. "Give....them to...me." She clutched the tickets in her hand.

"You know, when I was your age I had about four boyfriends," Virginia said pointedly.

Bert shook his head, and shot me an empathetic look, though his eyes twinkled.

"Gemma, do you have a boyfriend?" Joe the ex-cop wondered.

"Sure, she probably has about fifty-two, one for each state and two for good measure!"

"No, I-I don't." I looked at my fingernails.



Joe's wife chimed in, "Oh, Honey you're not bein' fair to anyone, give the poor boys a chance!"

"That's a lovely dress," Joe remarked.

"I made it," Mimi said proudly.

I shrank into my seat, feeling like a specimen on a slide. I looked at the floor and waited for the attention to shift away from me, from my body.

The next hour was spent listening to Virginia crack sex jokes. I'd never seen Papi more animated. He laughed heartily every time she let out a swear word. She'd take a big breath, like a pitcher winding up, and then let out a loud "*Caralho!*" She also incorporated enough variety to offend the non-Portuguese speakers in the room, exclaiming every curse and anatomical reference that came to mind.

When it was finally time to leave, I was relieved to leave the cacophony of curious voices. When it was my turn to hug Virginia, she grabbed my hand and hissed, "Don't get off, don't ever stop, flirt with all of 'em, kiss the ones you like, fuck the ones you love, it all comes out in the end."

I nodded because, well, it seemed like the right thing to do. *Obey your elders.*

She winked.

When the phone rang the next morning, I had a feeling. When Mimi nodded, and shakily hung up the receiver, I knew.

"Last night." Mimi said this quietly, to no one in particular.

"What?!" I felt bile rise in the back of my throat. I bit my lip and my eyes grew moist. I felt angry, and confused. How could someone just go ahead and die so unapologetically? Poor Bert, poor Mimi. I hugged her, trying to keep it together. I'd never lost a friend.

That afternoon, Bert called again, inviting Mimi and I over. We went over to the house and Bert met us in the driveway. He looked tired, and relieved. "I'd like you to go through her clothes," he said. "Please take whatever you want; Goodwill isn't even accepting donations with the economy being what it is."

He led us inside, through a narrow hallway; the walls were stucco and framed vintage photographs hung casually, like an afterthought. The subject of most of the photographs was a beautiful, lithe blonde with a glint in her eye. She was so striking, in an infectious way that made me just want to stare and stare.

“Gorgeous, isn’t she?”

I startled.

Bert looked at me with kind eyes. “She was a model, you know.”

The woman in the photo was wearing a red dress, her mouth full of laughter. Somehow, it wasn’t hard for me to accept that the woman in the photo was Virginia.

“Her room is right here”

It was a bright room, with a white wicker vanity and a quilted twin bed. I wondered if she ever really slept in here. Bert motioned towards the large closet that took up almost the entire far wall.

“Please,” he said. “Help yourselves”

My grandmother and I hesitated.

“Go on,” he urged. He opened the closet door. “She had so many damn clothes.” He looked tired. “I’ll leave you ladies to it”

My grandmother started on the left side, I on the right. We flicked through the garments like they were department store clearance. Some items still held their tags. Floor length dresses shared space with blazers, blouses and vests. I ran my hands over silk and suede, pinching quality between my thumb and middle finger. It was all so luxurious. Then the stench hit me. Mimi’s nose wrinkled. Cigarette smoke.

It had permeated the fabric, seeped into every fiber. I plucked a silk top off the rack and held it to my face. It reeked.

“It’ll come out in the wash, right?”

No response.

“Right?” I glanced at Mimi.

She was holding a fur vest and she looked dazed. I lowered my voice.

"Mimi" I said gently.

She snapped to attention. "Yes, yes I think so," she said hurriedly. "We put it too in the dryer with sheets" her English was becoming more broken as she spoke.

"That vest is beautiful, you should try it on."

"No, no I would never wear it."

"Try it" I took the vest from her hands and placed it over her shoulders. The fur was soft, supple.

Mimi didn't speak for a moment. She considered her slight reflection in the mirror. Her hand floated nervously to her hair.

I pulled out a pink, silk nightie with a matching silk robe. It looked brand new. I was struck by how feminine it was. I'd only ever worn flannel and old T-shirts to bed.

"Jesse will be so mad..." "He'll say, 'you no need all this junk!'" She shook her finger, imitating Papi's stubborn demeanor.

I knew she wanted the vest, just as much as I wanted the nightie—two luxuries we felt we shouldn't want. My musings were interrupted by Bert. He entered the room with two trash bags tucked under his arm and two glasses of lemonade. His face looked lighter.

"Here you are, ladies."

I took the bags and gave one to Mimi.

We spent another hour there, Mimi and I. Sifting through the tobacco scented couture. We each accumulated a modest pile.

"I need to get the car."

"Why, Mimi?"

She clucked her tongue. "We can't just walk around the corner with trash bags. Jesse will get angry, he'll say, why you need all this junk! He not like it." Her eyes glinted mischievously.

While Mimi went to get the car, I sat on the corner of the bed. I couldn't even smell cigarettes anymore. I held a leather purse in my lap, and stared at the wall.

When Mimi returned, we gathered our loot. Late afternoon had given way to darkness. We stashed our goods in the trunk. Mimi adjusted the driver's seat so her chin was almost touching the wheel.

As she backed out of the driveway, a streetlight caught on the rearview mirror, passenger side. Oddly enough, the words were projected as shadows on her chin. The words "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear" splayed in reverse like a beard on the side of her face. It was so peculiar, I wanted to reach out and touch the backwards words, to see if they had somehow altered the topography of her face. Instead, I sat on my hands. The car turned and the shadows shifted entirely.



## Feather Bed

The silver earrings I lent my mother the night before  
are sinking fast in the dust on her jewelry box  
I can hear the chipped gold necklaces yelp for help,  
the few remaining rings send out a signal for their lost mother  
The engagement one  
Not quite like the heart of the ocean, but left to the sea all the same

I slink down on the feathers atop my Grandmother's old mattress  
New with the white sheets of my mother atop them now  
Sheer pink curtains envelope us and I play peek-a-boo with the shimmering  
roses  
They were bought with little money, but shine so bright under these beige  
lamps

*My mother can make everything so beautiful*  
Sitting next to her now, I feel like a slug hiding on the bottom of a rock  
I am afraid to see  
But I hear her skipped breaths and am forced to find her pained fingers hide  
her watered eyes  
All I can do is grab her hand

*Is this right? Should I say something? But what?*  
And then her warm thumb wraps around mine and I know this might be fine  
While she speaks, I want to gather all  
the pencils  
bubble wrap  
sheets of money and silk  
puppies  
granite tabletops  
and tallest Christmas trees I can find and hand them to her  
Give her so many things and throw in her favorite bottle of wine too

"I don't want to have to fight anymore."

I could say, "Well, you don't have to."

Here's the world and then some

I don't have these things

I know people who do though

I know people who sleep on silk and feathers from France

I know people with porcelain lives

These people are nice and I like their smiles and think their hearts smell like  
clean, fresh laundry

Somehow though, my mother's feathers will always be the nicest

I know this because when I say to her, "I love you so much"

she says, "Not as much as I love you"

I know this, because my mother can make everything

Even pain

so very beautiful.

## Ode to a Pen

Capturer of thoughts and lines unspoken:  
Your lifeblood flows as mine quickens  
with words I haven't quite  
learned how to say out loud,  
and those that force themselves  
to cower within the dark.

You hesitate,  
ink frozen and fearful,  
poised over the page like a diver  
upon an unfathomable cliff,  
perhaps merely restrained  
by motionlessness of my fingers.

Black flows, you finally touch down,  
my confidante, my secret-keeper,  
briefly kissing paper and  
singing poems into being.  
This torrid affair, one glance away and it's over  
as I drop you with a frustration-tinged sigh.

Halt, pause, stutter, freeze.  
Do my efforts frustrate you  
when I stumble over phrases  
like uneven cobblestones or gnarled roots,  
each scribbled-out line and doodle  
one day closer to emptiness?

When my desk drawers  
slide close for the night,  
is that when your unseen life begins?  
Do you mingle with the others,

and weave fantastic stories about  
the timeless epics you have recorded?

The last drop of your substance  
stains my page like a gasp of breath,  
and I mourn your loss only for the span of time

it takes to find a replacement,

the cruel and unfeeling mistress  
I warned myself not to become.

Are you dying as I write, as I live?



---

## Slowly Last Summer

Last summer, I worked at Ocean Beach Park, which has been the center and showcase of New London, Connecticut since the 1920s, more or less. Ocean Beach is promotionally proclaimed the “Finest Sugar Sand Beach in New England” and is situated on the lip of Long Island Sound. It’s the home of miniature golf and water slides and an Olympic-sized pool and a playground and a WOW Workout World, all wrapped around a recently renovated boardwalk. Ocean Beach employs half the youth of New London, not to mention many stragglers from nearby Waterford and Groton, so I am joining a proud tradition.

I begin my employment in the gift shop. The gift shop is hunkered to the left of the entrance to the boardwalk from the parking lot. It’s separated from the dark cavity of the arcade by the faux-Grecian pillars of our banquet hall and it’s around the corner from the Carvel ice-cream window. Inside, the gift shop is small and stifling, containing a haphazard shelf of chintzy shirts and shedding sweatshirts, and everywhere else displaying baffling keepsakes—glittering clownfish paperweights, flip-flop ornaments with peeling paint, discolored globes containing lobster claws. For most of the summer season, manning the gift shop is a one-man job, but in the early weeks of June, people pour into the gift shop in hordes for their season passes. I barely have time to greet my co-worker Keisha, a curly-haired girl a few years older than me who attended my elementary school, and fish a maroon employee T-shirt from a box in the dusty back room before five customers have streamed in. Keisha explains the deal to me as she works, and after watching her a few times I brave the fray myself.

It’s \$55 for residents, \$85 for non-residents and that’s for the sticker that’s good for one car, we have to attach it ourselves to the window so if you could pull your car right up in front of our door that’d be great. If you’re getting your windshield replaced, you’re going to have to come back for your sticker later. If you get in accident— I guess you’ll have to talk to our manager Dave. If you want the special hanging pass, that’s the *transferable* pass that can go from car to car, that \$90 for residents

\$120 for non-residents, that's the better option if you have two cars and want to be able to get in with both, but no you can't pass it from one car to the other if you're driving both cars in on the same day. *Obviously*, Keisha and I huff to each other when the customers leave. We need your license and registration, please, registration needs to be current, if you don't have a registration a piece of mail, specifically a bill, a phone bill would be just perfect, we're sure you do live here but if you can believe it there's been problems in the past. Thank you and enjoy your summer!

It's surprisingly easy. There are sticking points. One short man with mournful eyes has what the last name on his license makes me guess is a Hungarian accent, so thick I struggle to understand him, and I can't communicate that I need his registration. A woman with winged sunglasses and a tawny perm grows deeply offended at the revelation that non-residents do not receive a senior discount, and I have to take some time placating her. But overall, the communication comes quick and rhythmic, which is nice because I tend to flounder in small talk. They key, I muse, is to have an objective and a language. Here, you're going for the same thing each time, and you can build from the same key phrases, just enigmatic enough to the layman to give you an air of world-weary competence and pithy wisdom.

Maybe I should become a diner waitress, I reflect. It seems like a similar philosophy.

A lull comes, and I slip outside to go to the bathroom. Or at least that's what I say- really I just need some air that isn't heavy and smelling ever so slightly of mold. I walk down a little, then lean against the bar separating beach from boardwalk and look out. New England's Finest Sugar Sand Beach- no reason not to believe it on a day like this. The sand stretches soft and white, the water is dappled and shot with light, the lapsing estuary waves gentle. Umbrellas are open like flowers, people sprawl on towels, kids run with Frisbees. You can look across to the squat power-plant buildings of Groton and be grateful about which side of the Sound you're on.

I walk a little further, down past the playground, which is bright

and irregular like a Doctor Seuss illustration, and the beach volleyball nets. I take in the smells, the sweetness of the water with a tang that pulls at you like a tide; the clotted smell of grease from the Sandbar Café, which is always at work making fried dough for the masses; in certain winds, the slick stench of the dumpster that hulk near the front of the park.

Since Ocean Beach's inception, way back in the days when trolleys bore people with bobbed hair and bathing costumes to and from the beach, the park has been claiming that the boardwalk is a mile long. It wasn't then, and it isn't now. Some promotional material will now offer a half-mile length. Nope. Ocean Beach's boardwalk claims are a discrepancy that's part of the premise.

New Londoners accept this. Outsiders can be befuddled. A few weeks later, when I'm working in parking, a man and his wife exit their car and knock on the door of my booth to confront me face to face. The man is wiry and intense, and he lowers his tinted sunglasses when he speaks to convey his sincerity. The beach wasn't what he'd been told it would be, he informs me as his wife drifts apologetically behind him. The boardwalk was far too short. He'd been lied to, misinformed, betrayed even. He'd driven all the way from Springfield, Massachusetts.

"Well," I explain brightly. "You can walk on it for a mile. You just have to turn around a few times."

He looks at me for a long moment, then shakes his head and goes back to the car.

After a few short weeks of gift shop, I am cycled to the pedestrian gate, where I wave along cheery residents with their walk in passes and passels of kids, and am polite yet firm with nonresidents who are sure they never had to pay before. "We've been charging to walk-in for a couple years now," I explain, politely declining to add, "You know, like the past two decades."

The pedestrian gate is a solitary place. It's a cramped little booth with dingy windows at the outermost tip of the park that faces one of New London's more gentrified streets. It's never too busy at ped gate, and I'm isolated from the rest of the park, like a lonely captain at the helm.



Every morning I get keys, cash, and my radio from Dave, who is the manager of the beach and a monumental optimist. Our conversation has very little variation. On a nice day, he'll say "Looks like a good one!" On a clouded day, he'll say with utmost confidence, "Looks on the radar like it's gonna clear up!" Either way, I agree, and he tells me to radio if I need anything.

I open the booth and place the bills in the cash register, then settle into the white plastic chair with a rough cushion brought in by Leo, the elderly man who works the gate on days I don't. Leo's cutting back his hours because he's starting to fall asleep at his post.

I can read at the pedestrian gate, and read some more, and work on my book of crossword puzzles, and grow bored with both of these and stare at the wall, and see how far I can tip my chair back without falling over, and use the stamp intended for the hands of beach patrons to decorate the wood trim of the window. That being said, there are customers, and they aren't without interest. I talk to parents who tell me about when they used to work at the beach, and kids who stare at me like I'm the man behind the curtain in the Wizard of Oz, and slouching groups of teenage boys who want to know with seemingly genuine interest and concern if I ever just want to take some of that money.

And then there are other customers. There are a range of bad beach patrons, but after only a few days of work I'm able to isolate the worst group: the yeppers. Yeppers don't grouse about the price- I can handle this, and it's not as if complainers don't have a point. New England's Finest Sugar Sand Beach doesn't come cheap. Nor do they try to get in through elaborate excuses and subterfuge. These people are entertaining at least, and allow me to practice my sympathetic yet firm voice, which I feel will be useful in later life. No, yeppers comprise the segment of people who, when I tell them as they are moving into the park to have a nice day, or enjoy the beach, in response grunt, "Yep."

*I try to throw a small bit of politeness their way, and that's what I get?* I grouse internally (and aloud sometimes, if I'm confident no one is



around.) I'm not trying to sell them anything, or hit on them, or tell them about the saving power of Jesus Christ. I'm offering a simple pleasantry, and I don't understand why they feel the need to grunt and keep their head down and plow forward like I'm a drag on some sort of critical velocity they need to attain to enter the beach. It hurts my feelings.

"Thanks" is one syllable. "You too!" only two.

Then again, perhaps conservation of syllables isn't something I should complain about. The more prolix of visitors to my booth offer their own irritations. One burly man with wisps of white hair and a pugilistic expression visits my booth on several occasions, though never to actually enter the beach. Instead, he wants to talk about the problems he sees at Ocean Beach. At one point he informs me that a bus of kids wants to get in, although they don't have any money. I can't do that, of course. Another day he wants to have a word with me- he saw someone walk right by me and not pay to get in. That's no way for an employee to act. As a small business owner, he'd fire someone who wasn't doing their job. The next time he wants to apologize, and also to tell me he's heard people are trying to sneak in on foot through the parking gate.

He lives across the street and, judging from these interactions, observes the human traffic of the beach at all times. I don't know why he has appointed himself the sentinel of the park. Perhaps it's his chance to be a superhero, with Ocean Beach his unlikely Gotham, or perhaps it's simply an outlet for a yen for activism. Frankly, his scrutiny alarms me. At every one of these conferences, he's wearing a T-shirt with an Old English Sheepdog on it.

Of course, when I'm too irritated with the customers, I can find camaraderie with John, who comes at the end of the day to collect the money and lock up. John is a lean man with a bristle of silver hair and a thin mouth who always wears sunglasses. He reminds me at times of a quasi-urbanized Clint Eastwood. If individual customers annoy me, John seems to harbor deep contempt for the entire pool of people on whose dollar Ocean Beach survives, and indeed for humanity as a whole. "Assholes," he'll growl out of the side of his mouth as the last paying

customer shuffle by. "All right, you're all set," he'll add to me, and I'll smile gratefully and exit.

Another spot I frequent is miniature golf. The most entertaining part of this post is giving out the golf balls. Wives want pink almost invariably. Husbands will gruffly say, whatever you got, distancing themselves from this girly flimflam business of color. I give them classic white, so they can pretend they're out on the links rather than at a kid's course with turf like crumpled felt and holes with windmills and whales. The kids are fun, intent like they're calculating a singularity, musing out loud on the merits of blue versus green versus the baseball pattern.

I work miniature golf from five to about nine. On these evenings I watch the sky turn a soft blue, with the sea two shades darker, moving toward indigo, both seamless, without cloud or apparent wave. The air turns sweet and temperate, tender after the blaze of the day. Springsteen's cool evening light. Looking out, I can see dusky figures still on the beach.

Every other Friday night, I work at the pedestrian gate from five to nine for the fireworks. For the first hour or so of that job, there's a lot of pushback. Ordinarily it's free to walk in after five o'clock, and I have to explain to each irate person that we have to charge until the fireworks start. Some people are eloquent in their distress, while others just curse and stalk away.

But around seven, the tone changes. Everyone wants in, and most people just flash their passes at me with a smile. I see people I know-current classmates, pals from middle school, teachers, former rec basketball teammates. It becomes a pageant of my New London experience past, present, and likely future as well. In stream teen mothers, old men in sweaters, the middle-aged trumpet player who plays in a band and always calls me sweetheart. Everyone's friendly, some people try to sneak in but are easily rebuffed, there's an air of anticipation. On the radio, I listen to the progress of Pyro Steve, who handles our fireworks. Pyro Steve is his professional handle, and simply hearing the name on my radio is enough to make Friday nights good for me.

Pyro Steve won't rush his artistry. The sky has to be truly dark before he'll ignite the first spark. As the sky turns inky John appears at the gate, waiting for the fireworks to begin so he can lock up.

At the first boom, he's in, securing the window and waving me out. I move quickly toward the boardwalk. There are droves of people, leaning against the fence of sprawled on the beach, every face upturned. I sidle into my own place against the fence and watch. It's amateurish work really, bright and simplistic. Yet everyone's riveted.

For his grand finale, Pyro Steve sets off as many fireworks as he can at once. The noise that was sonorous and stately becomes crackling kamikaze fire, the colors that were consistent turn schizophrenic, the sky shudders with great sonic dandelion bursts. It's haphazard, half-crazy. But there is applause in the end. For several long seconds, before everyone breaks for their cars and the mad entanglement of the parking lot, there is applause.

Object Petit A

if only in the visible  
(credit check, drink in hand,  
wireless forwarding)  
are we, here, the makers  
of ourselves, cracked mirrors  
and flyless swatters give meaning  
and establish wholes. like we,  
moving forwards, backwards, in flux  
(and opiate dreams of self invention).

What you think is an object is a chamber.  
What you feel in your ribs when you wake  
at night is love crawling through your veins  
into your bed, its posts, your lamp, the unread  
books on their shelves, the unreturned letters  
from your relatives, the corners of the room  
that were once warm with radiating humanity  
but now sit and gather several unheard nothings.  
What you think are objects are prisons.

And it's fine to put on the record that you love  
your prison and cower into it like a moth, but since  
soon your life will blink and break its brief glance—  
have you ever wondered, alone and listening, with God's  
hands reaching down into your gut, *There is*  
*nothing alive, and there will never be. I do not*  
*understand this dialect of emptiness.* Have you thought  
you've wasted your time in the black water of observance?  
Turn off your lamp. Swallow 100 mg of N,N-Dimethyltryptamine.  
Proceed into the void.

Observe Hell & Heaven vying for your affection.



Then, wake up. Twist and writhe in fear. Allow your cold  
body to spasm in sweat. Fight. Lunge. Breath-grasp.  
Acquiesce. Close, Open & Close, Open your eyes one at a time & now:  
What you think is an object is Paradise.

---

## Breaking News: Grownups Fear Return of Disco

Drop City, Bass County, in the Great State of Drugs and Alcohol,  
Home of the Don't Need to be Brave Yet's,  
Reporting to you live from the Corporate Sponsor Center:

Thirty thousand of Our Nation's best and brightest have spontaneously  
combusted.

One generation, 18-22 years of age, is reported as lost.

At least two dozen witnesses have liked this on Facebook.

The Future Employer Department has just arrived on the scene.

Leading climate experts are link rising temperatures and "Levels" to neon  
spandex.

With careers at a standstill up and down the coast, efforts to evacuate those  
at-risk were unsuccessful.

Wide-eyed victims have described the sensation of losing themselves as  
"EDM" and "the weekend."

Authorities are now scrambling to suspend all expressions of youth and  
innocence until further notice.

## Neuroscience

It is funny  
not funny  
that we are preoccupied  
with who we eat dinner  
with, when we will leave  
and lock our doors with  
our little bronze keys –  
the room number imprinted  
on the side.  
We wait beside our phones,  
because we expect  
someone to answer  
and I watched him speak  
in a video, and he looked  
at the camera – at me –  
he said, everything I have  
been so far, is nothing,  
not next to who I see myself  
as, like a tiny smudge  
on my running shoe. We sat  
beside each other in the only  
science class I ever took,  
because I had to, because it was  
necessary to get some facts  
drilled into me, because he had  
dark hair and wore soft shirts.  
I could feel how his presence  
drew my attention from lab  
instructions, because how can  
we follow a step-by-step guide  
to anything but the predictable?  
You feel small when you learn  
that someone you did not know

84

left, and then there is a hole  
where you think something  
understandable should be.  
They say that this is concrete,  
and we should grasp its importance  
because it is only the mere basics  
the froth on a glass of milk.  
I try to care,  
try to write notes to remember,  
to think about diseases and  
death and afflictions that make  
us convulse or sink into sadness,  
that there are names and body  
parts for the roots of all suffering.  
That knowing which brain lobe  
makes her crouch below her  
chair some Saturday nights with  
the pillows piled around her,  
that this will make me a better  
person, that this is a student.  
I read what he wrote and I feel like  
my whole self is tightening into  
a small shape of energy, and if I  
make color coded note cards I will  
forget what it's like when we jumped  
in the lake some nights in  
our underwear and I thought you  
would kiss me, the way your eyes  
looked from the water to the sky  
and I knew that the less words I  
used, the more I could tell myself  
was real, later, when the sensory  
neurons had slowed and all I had  
left was the notion that my



thoughts were an endless stream  
like crêpe paper twisted around  
a railing. Who are we to know  
why we feel memories like they  
are midnight carousel rides, small  
moments when you think about  
lighting a wad of paper on fire  
and holding it in your hand  
without letting it go – I like talking  
I like the feel of your words and  
how you form them in your mind  
without knowing how to know how  
we use our hands to tell each other  
something secret, but nobody knows  
what the secret is, not even us, it is  
protected beneath my skull, some  
where in the meninges, that  
must be where we hide all of  
the wants we cannot express,  
like how I want to tell you  
that I wonder how you think of yourself  
as you open a yogurt container  
or decide how to listen to a song,  
if you should close your eyes or  
hum or look at yourself in the  
rearview mirror when you sit  
in the back, how you watch a road,  
the people, all of them walk past  
and you know they are all trying  
to be what you are trying to be,  
and yet we can't seem to train  
ourselves to act like the perpendicular  
lines in our textbook, to tell each other  
our small secrets, each of them, together

might make us so close to what we repeat  
in neurological experiments, without  
using sheep brains and electrical  
shock and PowerPoint diagrams.  
He asks a question, he has a doctorate  
I look out the window and can only  
think of the time she made pasta  
and the kitchen smelled like boiling  
water and then she told me she was sorry  
for yelling when I asked my question  
it was not me but a drunk man who couldn't  
see whether the light was red or green or  
there at all – and across the intersection  
his arm and his heart broke when he looked  
over at the passenger seat, and then  
she put me to bed and I never felt so warm  
and cold as I stared at the wall in the dark.

## Of Dogs and Men

*(NED and ALAN, both 20's, sit at a table, apparently in a suspended card game. NED is on the phone. He nods.)*

NED: Okay.  
*(He hangs up.)*

ALAN: Who's that, Julia?

NED: No. My mom.

ALAN: Checking in with the folks, gotcha.  
*(Lays down a card.)*

NED: My dog's dead.

ALAN: Huh?

NED: Bitsie. She died this morning.

ALAN: Ah. *(A pause.)* Nahh.

NED: What am I gonna do? I mean honestly, what?

ALAN: Well, I mean, you know, it's your pet dog.

NED: Yeah exactly.

ALAN: Well, you know, it's not like, a person, or anything.

NED: Are you saying my dog is not a person?

ALAN: I mean, yeahhhh.

NED: What kind of a thing to say is that? I love my dog. My dog is a person too you know.

ALAN: Yeah, yeah, no, she's not, but that sucks though.

NED: Wow, heart of stone, huh man? No love?

ALAN: It's a dog dude.

NED: She! *She* is a dog! And anyway, she's so much more than that!

ALAN: A whole 'nother phylum, apparently!

NED: Fuck you man.

ALAN: Fuck your dog.

NED: Fuck you.

ALAN: Fuck your dog and her four legs and her stupid non-opposable thumbs.

NED: Fuck your mom.

ALAN: Fuck your dog's thumbs.

NED: Wow, we're done man, you're an asshole, you're not human.

ALAN: Neither's your fucking dog.



## New Document

File open. New document. New day. Edit undo. Hurricane.  
Edit undo hurt. Cut tragedy. Delete pain. Delete tears falling next to  
Mouths that can't find breath. Undo fallen trees. Undo  
This nature killing nature. Undo loss of life. Find. Find Tommy's little  
Sister. Search document for her pink polk-a-dots. Edit restore. Power.  
Restore Hope. Insert Mom. Textwrap mom's arms around child. File save.  
Replace foundation. Replace insulation. Replace walls. Replace roof.  
Insert table. Two by two. Align family at table. Zoom 50%. Review.  
Track changes. Protect document. Protect this family. Replace devastation  
With appreciation for this family cannot be replaced.

## We were Stars and the Sky was Our Grass

To a time when we ran as friends  
With the setting sun against our backs  
Whispering wishes against the wind  
In hopes that they would carry  
Far enough

To gathering old diner menus,  
School notebooks,  
Notes from past lovers  
Promising to keep our hearts safe.  
Statistics notes she'll never use again  
"Since the last thing I'll ever major in is math."

Papers which once held importance  
Now serves as evidence that must be destroyed  
Holding memories that only cause nightmares.  
The first test I ever failed,  
A periwinkle corsage he gave her at prom  
And then they never spoke again.  
Any flammable object which we desired  
To disintegrate

To our last moment  
And every moment after  
Our tittering concealing  
Growing pains involved with parting.  
You'll be back for Thanksgiving,  
but you won't be the same person  
I once had five classes with junior year

To building bonfires at twilight  
Without touching chocolate or graham crackers.  
For munching on sweets does not replace

Staring at the stars

Not out of spite or envy

But pity

For they cannot lay in the grass and shine as we did

On a chilling summer night

About a Man

I read somewhere about a man  
who would poison himself  
to numb his supple mind

because he couldn't take the hum of  
his own intellect.  
See, he would rather drive a stake through genius  
than live  
trying to manage genius,  
being socially responsible for genius.

I'm not saying I'm a genius, no--  
but I know what it means to crave static.



## Trojan

We go from 0 to 80  
No wonder I've wanted you so much lately

My hand grabs more  
You smell so sweet like a chocolate store

Let's swap spit  
You in suspenders and me talkin' like a brit

We can do it some kind of kinky  
Go down south and I'll be your little slinky

With me on top, you'll be my man of prey  
Don't worry I won't obey

I hold the nape of your neck  
"Wait, wait, wait" you say. "Hold on a sec."

I can do that. Put my tongue on your chest  
While you unclip my bra. Hey, we're fun undressed

I'm loud and allowed  
A sweaty bouncing Betty

You've got eyes shut  
A cute butt  
A body I'd kill to copy

You ask me to get on my back  
(Suspenders snap)  
"Sure thing, Jack."

This time it's avant-garde

A little hard

You can slap me or give me D on my report card  
Lips pressed.  
Under house arrest

Let's swap  
You're on top  
A little longer and

Shit...

I'll pop.

You're a fine bloke with a damn good poke and next time after I'd like to  
smoke

I'm not a woman, I'm a girl  
Lady if you ask me to twirl

And since you're a boy  
Who likes to enjoy  
You can start your ploy  
Steal me to your bed and I'll gladly be your Helen of Troy.

## An Ode

When they find you, you are holy  
Maggots gently caressed away the last of your tissue  
A crescendo of rupturing skin  
articulated the oppression narrative of the fluids beneath,  
who sought liberation from their celestially marbled coat  
In the closing act

Delighting in the dance of dissolved inhibition,  
Your cells bid farewell to their characteristic structure,  
and occupied the space of the exiled gasses

You were perfectly still  
and divinely beautiful  
in rigor's arms  
once gravity waltzed your blood downward

A clockwork ballet breakdown  
revels in its own simplicity  
mocking the desperate and ineffectual lunges of upkeep

You were returned to the earth  
by a body no longer enslaved  
to the complexity of your undulant mind

Allison Cavanaugh

---

Waves

*Digital photography, Nikon d5000  
Second Place, Photography Club contest*





Edwin Kosik

---

## Four White Women

*Digital photography, Nikon D80*

*Third Place, Photography Club contest*



Olivia Hovick

---

## Ropes

*Digital photography, Nikon S8100*



Monica Reuman

---

Alter Ego Self Portrait #3

*Mixed media*





Rikki Eble

---

Pebbles  
*Digital photography, Canon Reble xsi*





Monica Reuman

---

## Coney Island

*Digital photography, Sony NEX-C3*



Monica Reuman

---

Guanajuato  
*Digital Photography, Canon AE-1*

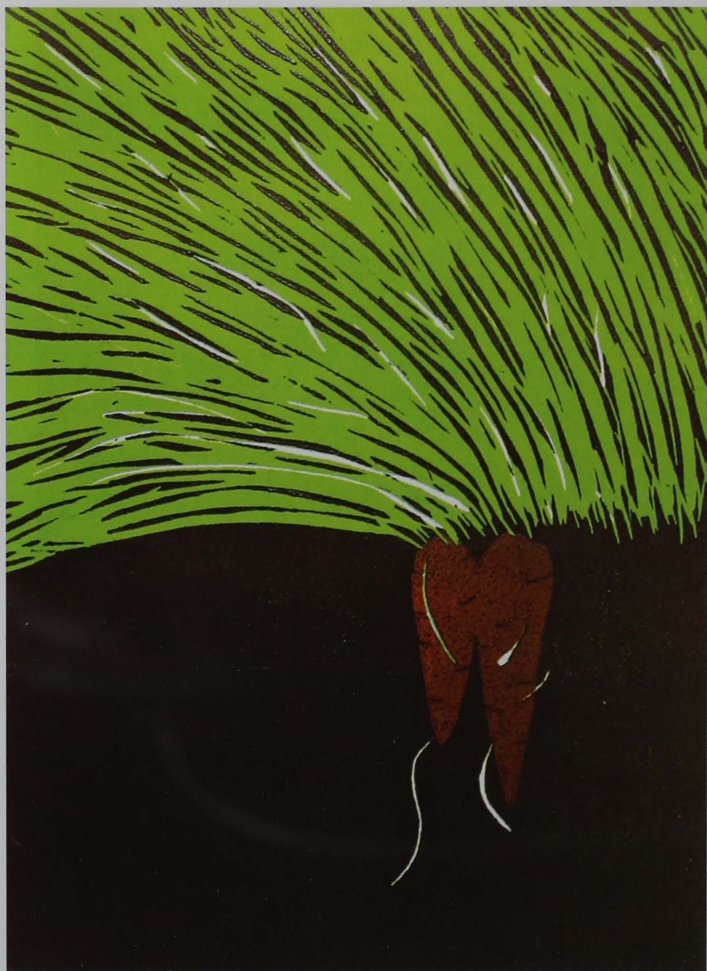


Angier Cooper

---

## Growth

*Ink relief print*



Angier Cooper

---

Evolve  
*Wood carving*

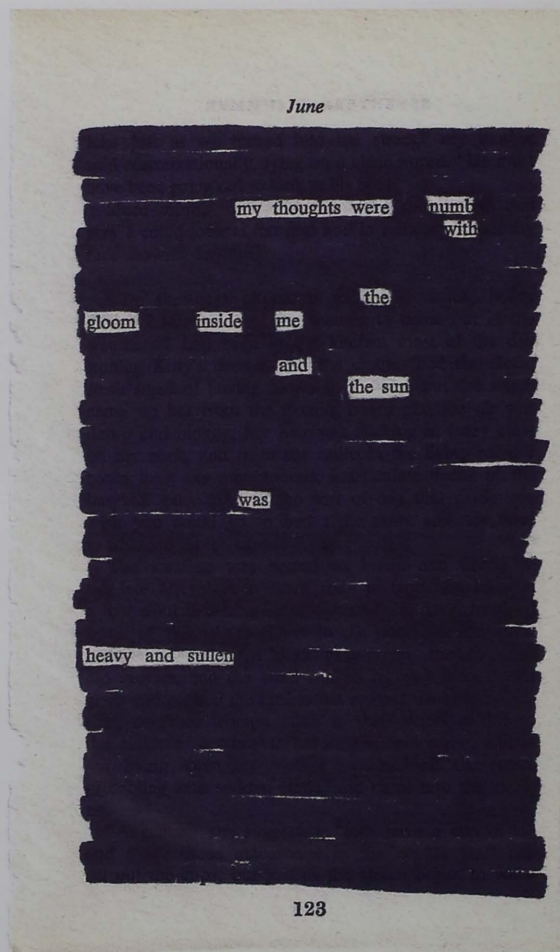




Erica Gorenberg

---

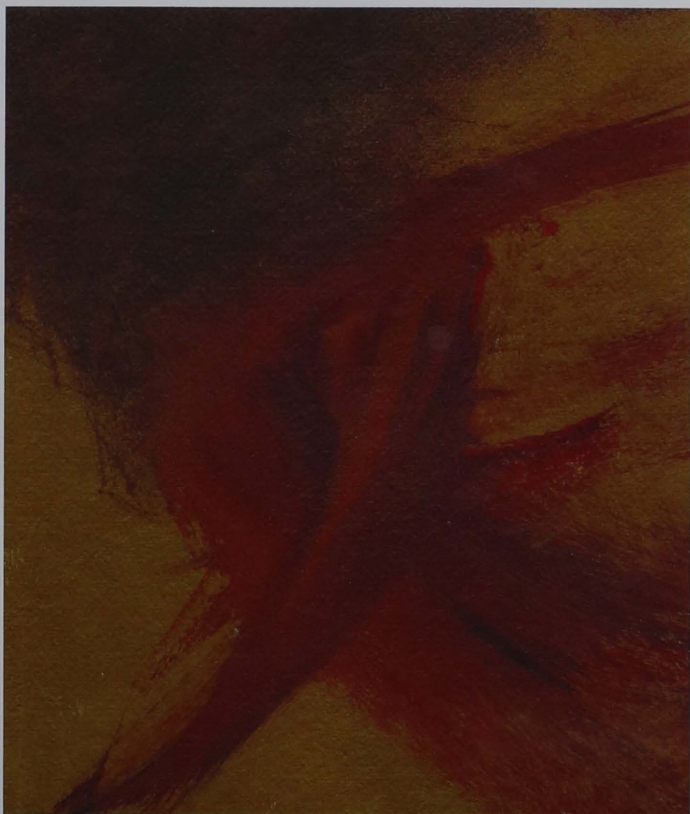
Winter Blackout  
*Permanent marker*



Rayna Nunes

---

Honeybee  
*Oil paint*



Stephanie Breitsman

---

Frames

*Film photography*



Julianna Lepore

---

Wanderlust  
*Acrylic paint*



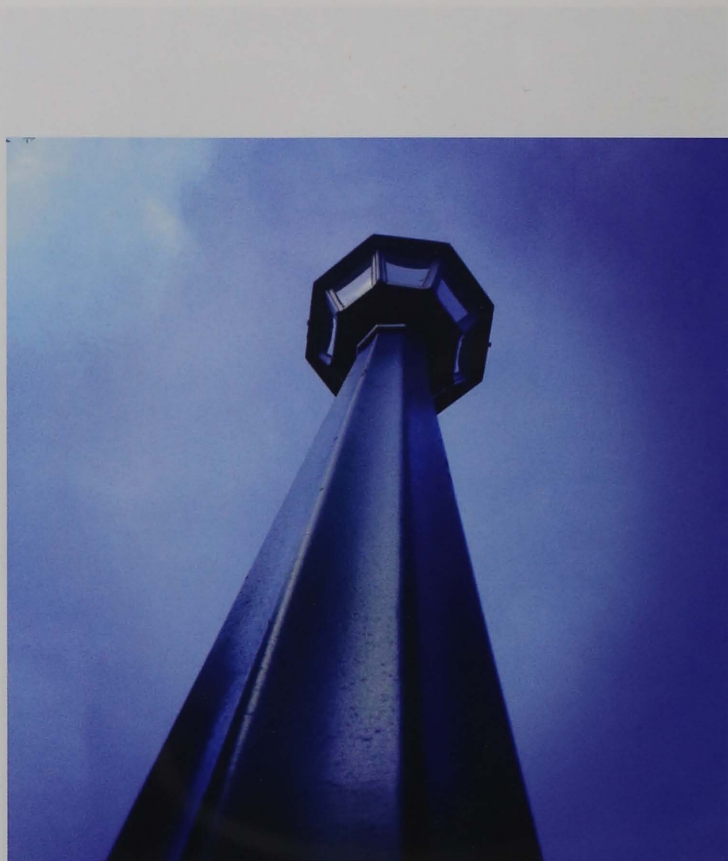


Michael Heimbaugh

---

## Guiding Light 1

*Digital photography, iPhone4 and Instagram*



Rikki Eble

---

Frick's Lock  
*Digital photography, Cannon Reble xsi*



Stephanie Breitsman

---

The Ones that Never Leave  
*Film photography*



---

## Payment for Rebellion

Gideon thought it might have started in primary school. He remembered she had sat across the table from him, her brown hair pinned back with pink barrettes that matched the rims of her glasses. Maybe he had felt it when she passed him the scissors or read out loud in class. He thought he probably felt it again when they had played soccer together, she with her hair in pigtails, longer than it had been before, both of them much taller. One time she had run straight at him, bringing the ball to his net, and they had collided, landing on top of each other. He had probably felt it as she lay there, half beside him and half on top of him, her freckles so close they could have been his. He couldn't remember the time last year when she had been jogging in the park, her dog leaving his owner to come sniff his shoes, but he was sure his stomach had jumped when he looked up from petting the greyhound and she was smiling down at him. There were times he knew of for sure because he'd written it down, like when they had snuck into that movie and sat in the back row, their shoulders, knees, shoes and pinky fingers touching, like they were connected along a seam. He could easily remember the thrill he'd felt, knowing they could get caught for being too close, but he could only remember the other feelings through the words he'd written. He imagined he'd felt then how he felt now with her pressed against his chest, the two of them leaning against the trunk of the old, dead tree in the woods behind his house.

"I want a really big yard, and woods in the back of our house, just like this. We could plant flowers and sit out on the grass when it's warm. Don't you think that would be nice, Gid?"

"Hm?"

"A big green yard with flowers. Do you think there's somewhere that allows a couple to have more than one baby? I always thought it would have been nice to have someone my age to play with at home. Gideon?"

"Yeah. That sounds nice."

"What are you thinking about?" She continued to stare out into the trees, the right side of her face resting in the curve of his shoulder.

"Nothing."



"I know you're not thinking about nothing, Gid."

There was a long silence, only broken by the sound of chipmunks chasing each other over fallen leaves that hadn't yet decayed.

"When do you think you first started loving me?"

Mae picked her head up off of his shoulder and looked up at him, keeping her arms wrapped around his waist. "I first told you that night in my room, remember?"

"But when did you know? When did you first feel it? When did *I* first feel it?" He could see her eyes darken before they fell to the ground. "I'm sorry."

"No, you don't need to be sorry. It bothers me too. But can't you just be here with me now? You have to let it go, Gideon." Her eyes pleaded with him.

"I know. I'm sorry." The truth was Gideon knew he couldn't let it go. He knew he never had to question his love for Mae or hers for him, but he wanted something more than a journal to go off of. He wanted not just to remember that their first kiss had been late at night in her garage, but what it had felt like to kiss her. He knew now from kissing her earlier that day, but it wasn't the same. They could both vaguely remember the moments they had had with each other, memories only made clearer from helping one another bring them back into focus, but the emotions attached to them were gone; erased. The only explanation they had was the immunizations. Gideon remembered coming back from his monthly immunization about a year ago and finding a note tucked into his book, telling him to go see Mae in the park at two o'clock that day. He remembered the confusion they had both felt, neither knowing exactly why they were there. Mae had shown him the journal then. The entire month before, they had written down their times together, and as Gideon read what he recognized as his handwriting mixed in with sections of someone else's, those moments came more clearly into focus. There were also descriptions of previous encounters before that month and feelings that neither of them understood. The last entry stated their plan to write themselves notes to meet in the park at the same time, sure that these memories and feelings were being blocked by the immunizations they received each month.

"Please say something, Gideon." He hadn't realized how long he had let the silence stretch, lost in his thoughts.

"What do we do about tomorrow?" Gideon could feel her stiffen.

"We go. There's nothing else we can do."

"I know. But what if..."

She pulled away and cut him off. "Don't. Please don't say it. You don't know we won't get picked to be with each other."

She was right. There was no way to tell who would be picked to be your wife or husband during the Ceremony of the New Season. It was something every sixteen or soon-to-be sixteen-year-old went through at the beginning of the New Season; something everyone knew and never questioned.

"Maybe we will. But if..." Gideon immediately stopped talking when he heard the crunching of a branch coming from behind them. Mae looked up at him and the fear in her eyes almost made him obey his instincts to run. The two stared at each other and stood absolutely still, barely daring to breath. It seemed like hours had passed before Gideon tilted his head to the side, Mae answering him with a small nod before slowly peering around the large tree. The look of fear melted into a relieved smile.

"Look," she whispered. Gideon turned and peered around the tree. A deer was standing several feet from them, now quietly eating the new green grass.

"He almost gave me a heart attack." Gideon laughed in spite of himself, so relieved that it hadn't been a person about to discover them. Mae slipped back into his arms, squeezing him tight.

"I miss hearing you laugh."

Gideon hugged her close. They stayed there for several minutes, Gideon not knowing when the next time would be that he could hold her like this. "We should get back to our houses."

Mae nodded against his chest and the two began walking back the way they had come in, holding hands.

"Gideon, can you promise me, if we don't get picked, we'll find a way to make this work?" She was swinging their hands back and forth, still looking at the ground.

Gideon imagined trying to continue cheating this system they had been born into. They had been lucky so far, but after going through the Ceremony? Trying to sneak around spouses and still not get caught or reported for suspicious behavior? He could remember last year when the rumors had started: two kids, older than he was, had been suspected of having a relationship outside of their chosen marriages. Their names had been Sam and Leah. One day they had just disappeared, their spouses assigned to Authority detail. Some said they were killed, other said they were sent to work as Authority slaves, but no one really knew for sure what happened, and Gideon had gotten a week in his room for asking his father. Gideon knew the Authority would not tolerate any breach of their system, but he also knew there were things he wouldn't tolerate.

"I promise."

"Gideon?"

Gideon flinched and looked over at the girl sitting across from him. He had been back at the hall, back watching the look on another girl's face as names were read from a scroll. *Liam Collins, Maggie Sullivan.*

"Sorry. What were you saying?" Gideon's ears were buzzing. He rubbed his eyes but the picture remained. She had only been sitting two rows ahead of him on the right side of the hall with the other girls. A white cloth ran down the center of the floor all the way up to the raised platform where the Authority official stood reading the names. The hall was only used each year for the Ceremony and everything was stark white: white walls, white platform, white chairs and white strips of cloth hanging from the ceiling. Everyone dressed in white too, the girls in dresses, the boys in pants and button-downs; everyone except for the Authority in their bright purple. The only other color came from the sun leaking through the dirty colored windows; the ones with pictures of men and women that Gideon knew nothing about. Some had gold rings around their heads, and Gideon wondered if maybe they were participants in the Ceremony since they were barefoot just like Gideon and the rest of the sixteen year-olds.

*Steven Hill, Jessica Masters.* Each pair called walked up the aisle and met at the platform. They were handed envelopes with their work information, each getting a long, thin chain placed around their necks that



was identical in color and design to their new spouse's. Then the newly-matched pair sat together on top of the platform.

"I was asking what you wanted to drink. Are you feeling alright?"

*Andrew McCullough, Samantha Schmidt. Walk up, take papers, sit down.*

"Yeah. Yes. Yes, I'm fine." *Travis Jones, Tessa Peterson. Walk up, take papers, sit down.*

"What do you want to drink?" *Gideon Sampson...*

"I'm fine."

"You don't want anything?" *Walk up, take papers, sit down.*

"I'm fine."

"But you..." *Gideon Sampson...*

"I SAID I'M FINE!" He slammed his fist down on their new, Authority-issued kitchen table. The cutlery rattled against the wood, and Rachel jumped. He immediately hated himself for snapping at her but he couldn't stop seeing the way Mae had looked as he had walked down the aisle with this blonde girl. No emotion, just blank emptiness as she stared ahead, not looking at him once. "I'm sorry, Rachel. I'm not feeling well. I'm going to go for a walk before dinner."

He had thought he could make it to the next immunization. Just forget everything that came before and live what he would think was a happy life. It had been less than a week since he had moved in with his chosen wife, but even though she was kind and caring, Gideon knew he couldn't live the rest of his life having these feelings erased from him; having Mae erased from him. And there were only eighteen hours before that would happen.

Gideon walked two blocks down the sidewalk and turned right. He tried not to think about the last words she had said to him when they had met in a secluded area of the park two days earlier. *Maybe it would be easier...if we just forgot.* She had left before he could think of something to say.

He stopped outside of her new house, breathing heavily. He might have known which house was hers, but he quickly realized he had no idea which part of the house was her room, or even if she was home. And what if her husband was home?

There was only one way to find out, and Gideon was going to feel like a ten-year-old again for doing it. He rang the doorbell and quickly ran to



the side of the house, peering around the corner so he could still see the front door. He waited there until the door opened and Mae glanced out, a puzzled expression on her face as she saw that no one was standing on the stairs waiting to be admitted. She closed the door before Gideon could remember how to speak. He walked up to the door, rang the bell again, and waited until she opened it once more.

"Hi." It was all he could think to say as he looked at her face. He could swear there were lines there that hadn't been there a week before.

"Come in quick." He walked into the entry way, which opened up into the kitchen and living room of the house. There was a staircase to the left that he presumed led to the bedrooms and bath. Most houses he had seen had much the same design, as if there were only two or three molds that they were created from.

"Mae, I..."

"You can't be here, Gideon. Kris could come back any minute. Did anyone see you?" She went and locked the door, pulling the curtains across the living room windows.

"I don't think so. Mae, please, I..."

"I don't care. You need to go. Leave out the back and go the opposite way from how you came here." She was already walking to the small door at the back of the house.

"Mae, stop!"

She turned slowly and looked at him, and now he could see the tears.

"Please, Gideon."

He walked to her and hugged her as she cried. She hit him in the chest with her fist. "You asshole. I told you to leave it. Please just go. It will be easier after tomorrow." He pulled away from her so he could look at her face, keeping his hands on her shoulders.

"Mae, what happened? Why are you giving in like this?"

"Because what choice do we have? There's nowhere to go!" She paused as she drew a breath and wiped at her eyes with the back of her hand. "When we didn't get picked, I thought maybe we could escape...find somewhere to go that isn't here, but the stories are true, Gideon. If you walk far enough...there's a wall. It's tall, and brick and it just keeps going. Before

the park, I found it. I kept following it until I saw an Agent patrolling along it. There are no doors. There's nothing else. We can't escape this."

"Shhh. Calm down. Shh. It's ok." She had sunk onto one of the kitchen chairs as she talked, and Gideon kneeled down in front of her, grabbing her hand and trying to soothe her. Her breathing became less and less ragged but the tears continued their paths down her cheeks. "Mae, if you don't want to do this, all you need to do is tell me and I swear I'll walk out of here."

"I don't know any other way." She put her face in her hands as the tears came harder.

"Then tell me to leave. Tell me we're giving up."

She shook her head slowly.

"Then we'll figure something out, alright?" He took her hands from her face and laid them in her lap, brushing away at the tears with the backs of his fingers.

"I'm scared, Gid."

"I am too. But if you go pack some things quickly and we leave tonight, maybe they won't realize anything is wrong until we don't show up to the clinics tomorrow."

Mae nodded her head and kissed him on the cheek before slowly getting up and making her way to the stairs. She hadn't been gone more than five minutes before there was a loud knock at the door.

"Authority Officials. Mrs. Turner? Please open the door." Gideon cursed under his breath and ran for the stairs, making it up them two at a time. He entered the first bedroom and saw Mae, bag in hand, her face white as plaster.

"Why are they here? Why are they here?!" Her eyes were huge. Gideon came over to her and held her by the shoulders. The pounding continued and they could hear shouting from outside.

"Someone must have called them. Mae, listen. You can go downstairs and say I forced my way in. They have to know I'm here or they wouldn't have come. Turn me in and you'll be fine."

"No."

"Go down and just open the door. Explain I held you against your

will and you'll be fine. Go now."

"No."

"What do you mean no? Mae, they'll get both of us."

"I know." She looked so sure. Gideon could still see the fear in her eyes, but he knew she'd made up her mind. He grabbed her hand, locked the bedroom door and ran across the room as the pounding continued. He pushed on the large window and it swung out to the left, giving him an unimpeded view of the ground two stories below.

"Mae? How many kids do you want?"

"What?"

"How many kids do you want? Four? Five?"

"Gideon, what are you..."

"I'm thinking at least four. Two girls and two boys, and we'll get a swing set in the back yard, big enough for all of them. You'll have a garden full of roses and we'll sit on our back porch watching the kids play until it gets too dark to see anymore." Gideon could hear a louder pounding, then the sound of splintering wood.

"I like the sound of that." Mae smiled even as Gideon could hear heavy footsteps on the stairs. He hugged her to him then swiftly picked her up, climbed onto the window ledge and jumped as the door behind them was forced open.

---

Yr Body Sour

man, i think, piss drunk,  
how like old valleys are our hearts--  
and what we plant in them--  
keep yr fine eyes and yr  
serpentine thighs-- the world  
screams colors but i'm outside  
with a cig listening for yr whispers--  
4 on the floor bass notwithstanding--  
my ears adjust poorly to silence

--but back to the valleys: i mean, look  
haven't i loved you enough already,  
yr body gone sour with beauty?  
i mean, i've waded through Jeff Buckley,  
Larkin, Blake, Foster Wallace,  
both Dylans (all intermingling,  
my heart beats flannel)--but really  
none are as exactly terrifying as-----

( you know i'm a man of at least modest...  
well it takes time you know ? thinking of it takes a lot ...  
my thoughts betray my face but how can i just  
shut you down like a crashed desktop ? )

-----my own hands' sufferings under the diurnal dream locomotive  
circumlocution  
( hands you said yrself were carved sexily from a matrix of skin  
i haven't seen since. )  
but ok, here, without the blunder of words  
to protect me, here's what's left (believe me, i'm not yet deluded yet.. . )  
flowing herds of men at yr feet and you arching yr back like a queen baffled  
standing semicircling yrself as they progress like beasts btwn yr legs each  
one biting off a piece of yr soul like steak laughing & spitting the bloody curd



deep

down into my wideopen mouth before i can ask you if you've recently looked  
at me and clutched yr chest like you used to or ?

say it in italian, whatever loving expletive  
you've got reserved for me, if that *fiume*  
hasn't dried up skeletal like the watermark of yr kiss.

say it into my stomach, what you feel for once,  
gently so i can throw it up if need be but we both know  
i'd have to be drunk off yr hips' blessed saccharine. where  
is yr touch? it's kind, and if i remember, warm;  
it made all the difference.

i mean, Marconi, himself an italian, fashioned radiowaves  
to pick up the voices of the dead--  
call me up like lazarus, baby, i'll be yr prophet--  
i'll remember to unwrap the bandages  
and place them neatly at the foot of the past,  
my back to the valleys and the images like rain,

falling.

---

Letters Not Sent

Hey Jack—

Do you remember me?

Barcelona, Museo de Picasso, but you were from England and I from the US. We stood beside each other in the book section, pressing our thumbs against the smooth paperback covers of Picasso biographies we did consider purchasing. I didn't notice you at first, thought, *which one?*, a memoir by one of Picasso's loves or a biography by an acclaimed literary critic. You stood beside me, a blank presence, until, as I fumbled through book after book, I observed that your hand traced the path that my hand had left, picking up where I left off, examining the same book I had been moments before. Shadow of my movements. To test my hypothesis, I relocated myself a few steps down to my left and indeed, you followed, for the first time I was aware of, looking up at my face. I didn't look back.

You see, I've imagined such things before, which is to say I have been disappointed before, and before I knew what was happening I experienced the splintering of a thread I had begun to pull the moment I noticed you. The first, that I knew I couldn't help but follow our interactions from this moment forwards, and the second, that, whether anything happened or not, I knew how it would end: with disappointment. For before you even spoke to reveal your language, before I even looked at you to reveal your appearance or what I would estimate your age to be, I knew you were young. How did I know this? Because you looked at me with the eagerness of someone who does not care if he gets caught, and this is also the expression of someone who has never been caught. Once I was not burdened with anticipation as I am now and I made eyes with a boy whom I left and then I did not look anymore. So when I see you looking at me—perhaps just to see if I would look back, perhaps just with curiosity-- I know you have not looked enough to know that it does not last, to know that to gaze is not necessarily to keep.

I do not look back, no, but perhaps you notice the twitch of an eye which knows that it is being seen. Perhaps, upon seeing this, you smile for

the first time, thrilled that this is happening, that we are happening, that while you and I are together *something* is happening. It is the happening that can only occur between two people, though you and I may try to replicate this excitement later with our right hands; the kind of happening which sneaks up on you and surprises you, the way that two individuals who have not seen each other for years may recognize each other in a crowd, arriving at the realization that they know each other at the same moment.

Yet we are two strangers, two young men—boys, even—and we have just become aware not only of each other's presence, but also that we are experiencing the same thing, and that these things directly involve each other. We may delight in each other, in each other's delight. How exciting, that this is happening. This is happening.

Yet whereas you experience this thrill firsthand, I recognize it coming and brace myself for the inevitable. My joy has a smooth underbelly of disappointment, rounded with time the way that mountains become themselves through many winds. For in sensing the joy, I know also that they joy will not last, that we are strangers in a gift shop, an exit-room, a room in which we purchase things to hold onto an experience already gone, to remember something lost.

Your mother walks over—*oh god*, I think to myself, *he's here with his mother*—and she speaks to you in English, but with an English accent. Another splinter: we speak the same language but are from different countries. I thought perhaps you were a local, which might ground you in reality, but no, you are a stranger like me; you are leaving as well. As you speak to your mother, I watch you, for I feel safe looking on you now that our interaction is indirect, and while you speak with her, you turn to look back at me and grin. This face of yours is not what I will remember. No, Jack, it is this name I will remember you by, how your mother addressed you, her son, a dear boy whom she would like to pick out a book a little more quickly. But for the past few moments, you have been inching happily towards me, staring at the side of my face as I turn to look away. You might be seventeen, and realizing this, I am embarrassed. How freely you wield your affection, even with your mother beside you. I envy you.

Exhausted compassion. So Pasolini called it in a letter from him,

fifty-something, to a boy whose age differed by many more years than between you and I. Yet I am not exhausted so much as wary. I have not lost enough to become tired at such charm. Your brother walks over and sees you flipping through the pages of the same book as me, a photography book of Picasso and his dog called *The Lump who Swallowed a Picasso*; it is a reference to the artist's dog, Lump, who devoured one of Picasso's works. He asks if it is about the artist having cancer and I laugh out loud. Both of you look at me. Your face, unlike your brother's, is overcome with a thrill that you finally got a reaction out of me, confirmed by your hurried act of pushing him aside to take his place by my side.

"Tough decision, huh?" you say, still grinning, speaking of course about the many biographies, but it is also to say, *Come on, let's speak!* I want to tell you how cruel you are being, knowing that every time you act, every second that passes while we are together, I am already replaying it in my head somewhere in the future, that in the short time we will be together I am making a memory I may remember forever, that I am already walking away from the place where I met one of the few boys with whom I began to communicate before either of us spoke a word. And he was seventeen, foreign, a tourist, someone who comes and goes but stays just long enough to long for the place he is leaving.

So forgive that my response was guarded, a simple "Yeah," but because I am suddenly thrilled by the prospect of remembering, of having this special moment which amidst the longing later will also bring me joy to remember, I look up and meet your gaze and together we smile. Because what a possibility life has offered us, like that bit of day we catch when on a train passing between mountains, the space between one tunnel and the next, here and there. You look down at the book I am holding now, a collection of Picasso's erotic drawings, and I want to say something more, so I tell you that I know I want a biography, but I don't know which one. You respond slowly, with a murmur of acknowledgement, picking up once again the first book that I had examined, the first one to which your hand followed mine. You pass it back to me, but your eyes are on my face. I look at the book.

Jack, after this, we parted ways. We did not look at each other again. You purchased the same book you had handed me and I stood behind you



and then did the same. Which is fitting, I guess, for the copy you had passed to me was the one you picked up moments earlier in our time together and replaced after I had already returned it. So the one that you took yourself is the one I picked up first, before I even knew you existed. An exchange of sorts. A gift. Something by which we might remember each other.

This is the question, isn't it, Jack-- whether you will remember me. I assume you too will lose your eagerness one day like I did, for it is in the remembering we hurt the most. Perhaps, however, I am not for you to remember. A strange paradox, it is, how we long to make memories but then long to relive them over living, how we wish that they could have lasted a little bit longer.

Once, while in Kyoto, Japan, I looked up from my ten days in that country and realized that they were passing me by, so I imagined myself remembering it in the future, wondering if I could somehow preserve this moment by sending it to myself in the future. Now it is nearly all I remember. Since this moment, I have spent the rest of my life living this way, taking notes for the future, giving up a little of the present to reward myself in the future, the terrible irony being that I lose out on what could have been different then.

What could I have done differently? It is both a plea for an answer and a resignation to a truth: I believe it could only have been as it was but I cannot help but remember, and to remember is to wonder what could have been.

This is the only part that always remains the same, Jack, this paragraph and your name. I have nothing else but my writing, and what is to write but to construct personal fictions? Here I am again, here we are again—mimicking each other again, acting as shadows, turning over the memory like a coin between my fingers, beginning again. I put my pencil to paper, trying to find my way back to a moment that only gets further away with every second that passes, and every time I tell the tale it becomes less a reflection of us, or you, but rather me, which is perhaps the only truth of memory. Still, I go back to the beginning, flipping back a few pages, to start over, becoming more and more aware it's not a letter I'm writing, but an elegy.

---

That Lake in Jamaica

That night we got to swim through the Milky Way.  
We pulled up fistfuls of stars in our little hands and  
As our treading legs kicked up the lunar light,  
The sky flew into our chests and my hair sopped with its diaphanous  
children.  
For a moment we were deep water astrologists and we didn't just interpret.  
We made those bodies move and we made them say  
Words we had never spoken but had felt in the tips of our capillaries  
During the birth we don't remember.  
We defied the forces in our lives that wrap around the stems of our brains and  
Tell us that liminal spaces are only temporary.  
The place opaque and deaf held the floating stars that we created  
In ripples and flooded down our limbs pooling in our palms, hiding in our  
eyelids and  
Dying with the caress of the air, the look in our eyes.  
If only we could have stolen them into our irises, drunk them out of daffodils.  
In that water we felt the orgasm of intentional ignorance.  
We felt the youth injected into us and the pain of its evanescence.  
We cupped age in our smooth hands too and studied it.  
We heard every language in its silences and felt  
The earth spin with us, cradle us. They blinded us  
But we saw down to the last exquisite nick in our consciousness.  
We saw the chemistry of absence and the tattoos of the planets in our  
freckles.  
These stars in this black sky this whole atmosphere this water  
We swam through and learned that there is no difference.

Live While Chiefs are Still Fighting: A Poem Found in the  
Transcripts of the Presidential and Vice Presidential Debates  
of 2012

In closed applause  
    you think beyond the nasty words.  
    You think nothing  
of this awful past time;  
    on every sentence  
    they speak  
of another love.

    Many sufferings:  
    about the dreams of adults,  
    happening  
across the water.  
    Chinese folks,  
    such a bargain;  
        there is nothing of culture  
    nothing of friends in this place.

You've put up with the night it happened,  
    troubled by  
    all the words  
    attacking the air.

    You watch mother  
trying to understand;  
    she trusts the big words.

    Criminals only know  
small words.

    Caught up,  
she forgets about  
    being unacceptable  
    and blamed by chiefs.

---

Lament for Mathematics

Mathematics

My first love, my objective Gloria,  
My rational confusion and comfort  
simultaneously, bound below and above.

How many hours have I given you?  
Between conjectures and proofs,  
a lifetime to most.  
I have worn down forests of pencils,  
created more dust than the Milky Way.  
You sat quietly, self-assured  
but never smug.

Do you remember that time,

$$t \rightarrow dt, \int dt \rightarrow t$$

when you gave me all?  
When vectors and integrals and chains  
and probabilities  
burned within me, brighter than  
a million pulsars;  
satisfied me?

Mathematica—

*Ageōmétrētos mēdeis eisitō.*

Have I forgotten Plato?  
The inscription above my door,  
fading,  
stares at those who cannot read it.  
Cantor laughs in the corner.



## The Robert Frost House

Rob, the tour guide told us, was in love  
with the idea of farming. He couldn't raise most crops, couldn't  
keep cattle milked, wouldn't  
strip the trees of their red apples- the neighbors didn't  
understand it. All he could keep were chickens.  
He was partial to chickens.

The guide wasn't old yet, though her hair was gray-  
but vital, curling, the quick in silver,  
not water left too long to stand.  
Her soul wasn't in her eyes, but in the lines  
that fanned from them, readable  
like a record of the moving earth.

Here is the kitchen. Rob wrote  
a poem about a handyman,  
old and loyal, dying here- it wasn't quite like he said.  
The rug here is red  
the color of Christmas  
just as he wanted it.

She was short, a little wide  
but light on the steps  
easy upstairs where the windows were closed  
and the air thick and still.  
She lingered a little in the doorway  
fondness on her lips.

Rob slept here- they slept here, he and Elinor.  
There's isn't so much to see-  
it's a room like any other, though Elinor loved  
this wallpaper- he ordered it for her.  
The window's what most people care for-  
130

look, you can see the mending wall.

She has being doing this for many years  
has walked the steps of his life many times over.  
Not for passion for poetry-

she told us she didn't know it so well herself.

She did it for New Hampshire's myths  
for the birches and the clapboard houses.  
For love itself.

Rob was in a gang  
as a child. As a young man, he walked  
into a swamp when Elinor said not yet.  
Hunters found him, shook their heads, and dragged him out.  
He threatened Elinor, once with a gun.  
His children are a sad story. Broke his heart.

And yet she lives easy with him  
lopping a syllable from his name.  
He's not the Northern Lights  
nor the thin ice that gives way beneath you  
to black and churning water.  
He's a man who wasn't much of a farmer  
And gave each of his children a telescope.

## People Fell in Love on Me

People Fell In Love on Me  
Sometimes, but not usually.  
Where they once slept, sat, and conversed as children.  
An open Ben and Jerry's container between  
two pairs of small legs twisted into pretzels

They dreamt on me  
about the wonderful life they wanted to have  
with a person they thought was wonderful that day.  
And they cried on me  
When that person  
Was not so wonderful anymore  
Someone wrote "I love Jeff"  
In green marker on a section of padding between two box springs.  
One day, a boy changed "Jeff" to "Jamie"  
as she laid asleep wrapped around him  
And I wondered who Jeff was and if  
the person who wrote it still loved him

And when the two fell in love  
I tried to stay silent, but my loose spring  
creaked when he shifted weight  
from his knees to his hands and arms.  
He didn't notice the noise I uttered,  
for he was drowning himself in her,  
and did not care for reality.  
But she did notice and  
when the creak travelled to her ears  
due to the immense atmospheric pressure  
which surrounded us all  
she giggled into his mouth and  
wondered if love was a loose spring in a mattress

Sunday Review

There are some things we'd rather not  
discuss, like when I learned I loved  
the theater and I was against the cool  
black floor staring up at that endless  
fly loft and he said look, it goes up so  
high and we both lay there a moment  
just waiting for a cue  
I think he laughed, and I had to stop  
myself from reaching out and grasping  
the machine-knit softness of his sweater.

There's a girl, and they said  
what could he possibly see in her?  
she's not so pretty, she's got a little pig  
belly, she's a tart. Once when I was seven  
I was sitting across the cafeteria for breakfast  
and the teacher aids came over, and she  
was cradled in their plump laps, screaming  
because her mother was dead  
just now, on the way to work, I heard it  
whispered across the emptying room.

We drank bourbon, you and I, honey  
I had an old orange juice container I kept  
filling up and we couldn't stop smiling  
I'm very drunk, I'm very drunk, you said  
leaning against the wall –  
Should I have another?  
We would have stopped, but sir, don't you remember  
what they said about the Nazis as they –  
this is awful, really goddamn awful –  
shot the Jews in the brain out in the forest that day?  
They said: such a life was quite intolerable sober.



## Looks Silly in Tiny Desk Chairs

He looks silly in tiny desk chairs. Smells like a hot desert and dirty linen. Grease at his temples and flecks of gray already? in his limp black curls. Pocky face scarred over and eyes that can't hide his bludgeoned feelings. He towers. Cowering, I can feel him looking. If only I could glean a genuine smile from his deep voice place...I would topple. And be only his object. But he towers. And I am below his sight line, my chin at his breast. And I am of the hills and the rain. And he is of the lowlands and sandstorms.

Oh, I am achy. His composure is unnerving; or it seems that way, hiding under his hat *and* hood? His humor spurts; is he laughing at my advances, pretending that he would like to hand me his heart and watching me drool over its candy coating?

I get sick if he talks too loud and it's not directed at me, delivering his lines in school plays, "Hang curs, hang!" Jealous of his lunch mates, roommates and forks; yes, he has this hold on me without even liking the way I walk or the color of my hair. Unaware of the power of his acts and indifference. His all consuming apathy only fuels my appetite for his dead glance.

I will never get that white smile out of my head. It's almost too big for your face, but really what makes it seem that way is that I never see it; it's so out of place. Looking me in the eyes and there are your canines and there are your lips stretched there is your happy. I am there too. I would live between your dentata melanco- lia and only breathe when you smiled, gasping I would begin; my survival would depend on your smiling, so I would learn what made your dimples dive into your cheeks, made you laugh, made you let me breathe each time your lips parted over your whites. And smiling would become easy for you. If only I could glean a genuine smile.

I want to go back inside the night when my name was on your breath and I gave you pain and pleasure in equal amounts. I licked the rain from your bare shoulder and breathed in deeply so you could hold me as close into your chest as you would.

Wednesday

He sits with me on top of the building. He looks up at the sky and its sifting clouds with fascination and does not move.

There is a statue of a woman, faceless, armless, legless.

She is leaning, sliding, curved, curling. Her two breasts seem detached, two blobs dribbling off her chest, as if added as an afterthought. I think she is melting.

"I hate that thinking takes away from me doing other things," he says, to no one in particular and himself.

I crack open him an orange and offer it as an answer.

There is a statue in the shape of a wheezing arrow on stilts. It is a black chunk that shines purple in the dusk light. I am tempted to sit on it, or pierce my finger on it, or something.

He nods and laughs. He runs a hand over buzzed brown hair.

I know what it feels like, but I do not touch it. I observe his face instead. It is long and thin, two coppery slits for eyes and a permanent, enigmatic smile on thin brown lips.

"You've got good features," I tell him, "High cheek bones."

He smiles. "What does that even mean?"

"Just really chiseled. It's a good thing."

He rubs the tops of his cheekbones. Thoughtfully. I notice his hands.

"Nice hands."

"Too?" he questions, adds.

I nod.

"What does that even mean?"

I take a hand that is not offered to me and tap it gently, turn it over, trace the contour of the fingers. "They're long and thin, artist's fingers." He blinks. "Musician's fingers." He smiles. His fingers are tan and lightly used. "You don't have any calluses," I point out, "and you cut your nails, and they're a nice shape, square and round." I think of the little stubs I see on chewed hands, the clumsy bear paws, the thick, knobbed hairy worker's hands. I think of the sleek white hands of a child and the bluish marbled paper of

grandmothers’.

He flips his hand back and forth in front of his face. His fingers are tan and lightly used. He has good hands.

“You should do your physics work,” I tell him.

He does not bother to wrinkle his nose.

It drizzles. It stops. It drizzles again.

We exchange more words for a little while. A pale pink film coats his eyes. We are both barefoot.

Abruptly he gets up, decides to ignore the apartment building’s rooftop garden and its inhabitants. Walks to the banister, leans out, stares. The city swirls below us, and he inhales deeply. The ebb and flow of humanity drifts tranquilly and he watches, entranced, as city and its children parade across his sky.

I open a book and begin to read.

The sun comes out and he sits above me, still looking out, still thinking. I tell him this is a good thing.

I eat another orange; the sun burrows into the clouds.

“I could have gone to India,” he announces.

“Oh yeah? What would you do there?”

A shrug. Brief eye contact, then he turns his attention back to the sky.

“Think.”

I fight back a chuckle and honor him a glance.

“You could do that here.”

“Yeah. I could. That’s why I didn’t go. I like the people here, they make me think.”

We chew on this with our breaths. It occurs to me that I seldom talk to him when I am not intoxicated.

Time and the bees play with silence.

“There’s just so many distractions.”

A shrug. Brief eye contact, then I turn my attention back to the sky.

“There’s distractions in India too. Good food, pretty girls.”

He grants me a smile. It is generously followed with steady unsteady eye contact.

"My body is a distraction," he agrees conclusively, folding his arms and settling back. "It annoys me."

I study the philosopher for a moment. He studies the world in response. People are more interesting than the world. I think they are the world. So do they. I wonder if I should point this out. He blinks lazily up at the sky as if to answer. I blink lazily back and address the sky too. There is a tacit understanding that he understands us better than we do one another. Or ourselves. Maybe. We blink in unison.

"You should talk more," I tell him.

He nods. "I like talking. No one wants to hear what I say though."

"You don't know that. Talk anyway."

"I think strange things. I think too much."

I tilt my head and offer him a comically raised brow.

"I'd rather think too much than too little."

His smile slowly grows into a grin. His teeth are straight and he meets my gaze now with interest. And then thoughtfully- "I agree."

Someone has appeared on the stairs. She has dark blond hair and glasses and passes us, pausing only to bestow us a puzzled glance. I realize I know her and wave, but she does not see me or chooses not to and does not respond.

"Who were you talking about Saturday night?"

I stretch my legs and rub them idly. I turn over potential answers my head, settling on one. "An ex-boyfriend. I was probably cursing him off in my drunken misery."

He nods, satisfied. Satisfied. Satisfied.

"I figured as much."

A yawn overtakes me and I indulge in closing my eyes for a moment.

"You were pretty miserable," he adds finally, lamely.

"Thanks for helping me."

"Didn't really do a good job."

"I don't blame you. You did what you thought was best."

I half expect him to pull out a cigarette and offer me a drag. He doesn't. He knew my answer before he asked. He is thinking. I am letting him



think. Viscous thoughts to match his swimming eyes. I flip another trite page in my book.

"You fascinate me," he tells me.

I chuckle. "That's very flattering and very amusing."

He digests this. "Thanks," he says, after a pause. "I'm not sure that's what I was going for. I guess I do that with most things I say. Not always flattery though."

A door opens. The girl has appeared again. This time she walks slowly, and towards us. She is smiling. We are smiling.

"Hey guys. I haven't seen you in so long."

"What's up, girl," I ask her without asking. "How've you been?"

"Good," she replies automatically, flipping her gaze up and down from our bare feet to the sprawl of our bodies against the cement. Her gaze turns to rest on him. "Seriously, I don't see you. You need to hang out more," she complains, scolding him.

I respond for him. I nod. "I was just telling him he needs to talk more."

He shakes his head. "Yeah, you keep saying that. I really don't know if people would like what I have to say."

"You should preach," I suggest, "like at a podium. To all of campus."

The girl nods. Her eyes are a milky green and her hands are small, stubby and round. Her cheeks are round too, everything about her is round and I search in vain for a single sharp point. It isn't there. She leans out too, suddenly, daring him. "Holy *shit*, this is high!" She grins wildly for a second. I realize she might be pretty. I forgot what that was, I think. I read about it in books sometimes.

He smiles at a private joke in his head.

"You probably shouldn't be up here. You guys finish your homework yet? Brandon I know there's pizza later if you want."

I am glad I don't like pizza.

"Nah. I think I'll just hang with Lizzy."

"Preaching to all of campus?"

"On a box," I add gamely.

"I don't have a box."

"I'll get you a box." She is chirping. Like a little happy bird, or a mosquito.

"What if I run out of things to say?"

"You could make a list. Like a sign-up sheet. Just talk about the world."

"I'll do it."

"You should."

"Such good ideas," I conclude for them. I yawn.

"Dude, when can I see you?"

"Soon," I tell her. I also tell her to visit me. I know she will not do this. We continue to talk nonsense for a while. Then she leaves.

The sun is a funny color and it makes things funny colors. The black shapes called statues have faded from purple to orange figures that scrape the sunset. The headless woman basks in it. The arrow sears through it. Another one depicts murder, a head throttled by a hand. It just stands in the sunset, like me. Juts against the background. The other ones are shadows that frame the sky's bright blood. But Brandon is not looking at the statues. He continues to gaze at the shapeless sky and forgets about fingers and cheek-bones and does not notice the small miracle of the statues continually shedding their skins as the night deepens.

"I don't know what to do," he finally confesses.

I briefly wonder about the missing prelude to this sentence. I skip to the conclusion.

"Do your physics homework."

"I don't really have to do it. I don't understand it."

"Ask for help. Teachers like that."

An irritated shake of head. "I don't."

An uninterested shrug. "You'll fail."

"I won't fail." A pause. "I'll get a C."

I laugh. "Come on. Be ambitious. You're smart. You're good at physics."

"You don't know that. You haven't seen me do physics."

"No, but you're very logical. You must be good at it."

He considers.

He gets up and walks around.

I flip another trite page.

He leaves. The drizzling has stopped.

I finish my orange. I stack the peels in a lopsided pile; one, two, three, four. It is a little pyramid sprinkled with seeds. I gather the other peels. I stack the peels in a lopsided pile; one, two, three, four. It stands across the other pyramid and fixes its comrade with an accusing gaze. They topple without my say so.

I begin to read. A squirrel chatters madly somewhere.

I am pretty sure the statues have become the color of wine.

The sky floods the roof with gold.

A door opens, he is back and I greet him.

"Stand up," he says, suddenly.

Then he gives me a hug without explanation.

I return the favor and press thanks into his shoulder.

Briefly, I meet his eyes. I look for the faint tinge of pink, but I am interrupted by his cheek bones and I cannot tell if it is there. I try to smile. But he is the one who speaks.

"I think I needed it too," he says.

Then he leaves again.

I stare up at the sky for a second.

Then I continue to read.

---

## When is President's Day?

"Turn it off," the surgeon yells. "Turn it OFF! Damn, it! I said on my count!"

Maybe he forgot that I'm wide awake. I should reintroduce myself. Let me put it doctor language: medical case #876452793, sixteen year old female, brown hair, hazel eyes, 5'6, one hundred twenty pounds, and AWAKE.

I can see him. I can hear him and I can feel everything. I want to slap him across the face and say, "Hey asshole, I'm not unconscious!" I wish I was, though. I watch his eyes dart around the room and my confidence in him is plummeting along with my blood pressure. The nurse sops sweat from his wrinkled forehead. He isn't even nice to look at. The hairy mole above the bridge of his nose looks just as scared as he does.

I was fourteen when I had the first procedure on my heart. It was great. The surgeon was a real looker, I started planning the wedding in my head from the moment I met him. It would be a destination wedding in Maui. My dress would be simple yet elegant, a little strapless number. A pink flower would hold back my loose curls that would frolic in the salty breeze while he would sing vows too sweet to talk. He would look as handsome as ever in white linen pants and a blue collared shirt. I loved him in blue.

The monitors hooked up to me beep obscenities of their own, but I'm quiet. Blue drapes cover my pale flesh. This guy is burning my heart to make it better. That's why I'm hanging out naked on this table. He's dropping the "F-Bomb" while burning my vital organ.

Sedation would interfere with my heart's electrical system. No cocktails, just oxygen straight up.

The mask is plastered against my face and cold air invades. I suck it down like Santa takes his 2%. Or is it skim that he prefers? Lab five is white, sterile. I can see my heart on all of the screens. I prefer "FOX," I like to stay up to date on my current events, but I'll take what I can get. An EKG traces my heart's rhythm in a scribble. I could draw something prettier with my left hand but they don't want help with their drawings.

Bright lights burn my eyes. I hope the surgeons slept well last night. Dad was upset when he found me still awake at 3am. But who sleeps before



days like this? Seriously, it's like Christmas except Santa doesn't wear red, he wears blue and he doesn't deliver presents, he delivers burns to your cardiac tissue. He doesn't take your milk and cookies, just your money and faith in modern medicine. My brothers stayed home. Mom said they couldn't handle it. No one asked if I wanted to visit the North Pole today. I should have stayed home with them. It's a good thing Mom can't hear the cursing. I know she is a frantic mess in the waiting room. Poor dad. While I was signing my life away, she asked a nurse where the chapel is. Everyone is praying. Maybe I should start praying. I close my eyes.

Eight hours later, I'm finally transferred off the chopping block to Santa's sleigh. Mom and Dad are huddled together in the hallway. Dad stares at me. He looks exhausted but nothing compared to her. I can tell she has been crying. I'm assigned six hours of bed rest. I asked for a candy cane instead but the elves are vicious here. Mandatory stillness hurts more than a marathon.

After the peaceful evening, the doctor stops by the room with his posse of interns and his mole. There are four of them glued to his leg like a pack of puppies. The interns listen to captain-curse-a lot as he explains my case. Santa's little helpers. I hope he isn't going to let them touch me. He does. The eager one with the glasses leans over me and closes his eyes while he positions the stethoscope just below my collarbone. His hand quivers on my skin, and his face contorts like he just heard baby Jesus on the other side of the scope.

My brother told me that they like to listen to my heart so much because it has direct satellite connection to the best Pandora stations. I told him they should see what his plays, but he says it's boring stuff like show tunes. Mine plays oldies, all the classics. It makes a lot of sense. Santa is old as dirt. He loves that stuff.

Nurse-care-a lot comes in to go over discharge papers with me and I autograph my way out of the hospital gown. I change back into my civilian clothes and do what I can with the curls. I am awarded with my new heart monitor. Cardiologists don't give stickers. And that's when I decided my new favorite holiday is going to be President's Day.

---

Two Years Later

*Two Years Later, or Forever, Whichever—*

To My Escapee ("let go of me," she'd pleaded),

Pinkened sunset sky set with darkened doom of the impending loom of shadow-clouds. It rained; dripped onto pavement in waves of dirty deluge sweeping down the drain. Contained in one determined drop played the attitudes of multitudes, to express depth in its explosion on the surface.

Outside I stepped, squashing suede sneakers in the downpour. Up to the conflicting light-dark sky I lifted my eye, mesmerized by lightning strikes fading back into twilight.

The restoration of calm.

Thunder pealed in melancholic tones, rumbling along to the aches of my bones, searching endlessly for a way home. I moaned; I groaned for all the loneliness I'd known; I atoned for my lack of good grace; promised to own the flow of progress.

I shone.

Fingers stretched to reach the Heavens, lungs drunk freshness of scents in Earth's aromas, flesh tingled with a vital shiver—I miss her—then vanished forever, thither into the ferocious forecast and out of sight.

I felt light.

The feeling was right; comforting, as you once had been. I cannot escape your influences or my remembrances; I must accept the passing of what was into what is.

You are sorely missed. If only you knew this, I believe  
I could bare the indifferences.

My conscience will always regret having said  
what was not meant. For that, I am truly sorry.  
And as truly, I will try,  
not to carry that feeling in me for eternity.

In well-wishes:

I hope your mirth is personally well-worth the world;  
that mistakes you make don't stake your self-esteem too sharply;  
that the farm and its people are meaningful and never grow old;  
that life is good, as it should be.

Tenderly, Me.

Better than Nothing

The pattern of large  
and small  
and fast and slow.  
Of light on dark.  
The image of infinity iterates  
outside her window.

She watches  
infinity interrupted  
by the drifting path  
of the start of autumn and  
the ceaseless slosh of  
tires through the street and

she is full of  
desire. A wish  
to fit the pattern; to  
be wrapped  
in this infinity and  
feel its tendrils,

and cold fingers  
sliding over skin  
and between fabric  
layers to the places that  
an unforgotten  
lover once

kissed and left behind holes  
and scars and  
a sense  
of lost infinity  
filled  
only by the rain.



## Istanbul

Where has that fluid  
bird of a kiss flown since  
we last stood atop that  
cobble golden swell called  
Galata? Since we last stood  
holding one another's heads  
in that prayer of April?  
How did the rain (in our hair,  
in our shoes in our laughter) ever  
drain into the dry succession  
of this sitting awake  
in the sprawling night, staring  
into fragmented ecstasies?

---

## Heartless Parallels and Perpendiculars

*In the night, I hear them talk/ the coldest story ever told./ Somewhere far along this road...*

In 2008, I spent my last summer at Camp Kinebig, which is actually not that far down the road; it happens to be a thirteen-minute drive from where I type this. My closest friend Herman did summer school instead of going to camp, so although I was a Senior and fourth year camper, my social struggles were amplified at least twofold. Many a night I would float around the grove from bench to bench, from group to group, making a concerted effort to find and join a conversation. I never quite knew when to jump in, and I don't think people wanted to hear whatever I had to say. I don't fully understand why I was not well liked. Maybe it was that I took everything too seriously, that I often bumped into conversations with grammar corrections and ruthlessly defended that habit, or that I was proud of my innocence, that I thought myself better than everybody except—I'll get to her in a bit. I felt no sense of control over my social life when nobody wanted me there, so I started eavesdropping. So then when I tried to jump into a conversation, they acted like I shouldn't have been there. I further lost my sense of control from that, so this pattern continued through the summer.

*... he lost his soul/ to a woman so heartless./ How could you be so heartless?/ How could you be so heartless?*

Okay, I wouldn't call Sandy Cohen heartless. In fact, from Sandy's first summer in 2006, I thought she was the kindest person at camp (not counting myself). The only unkindness I heard from her was in retort to unkindness toward her, which I only witnessed occasionally, but I got the sense that it happened often. She was not very eloquent in comebacks. Neither was I, for that matter.

My first impression of her came before I knew her name. On a Friday night in 2006, all of us Inters were sitting on the basketball court for our evening activity. I was bragging to someone about my knowledge of *Harry Potter* trivia, and she jumped in and asked, "What was the significance of the opal necklace in the second book?" In my next letter home, I asked my parents to bring *Chamber of Secrets* on Visiting Day.

Later that summer, Courtney and Lizzie came to me in the mini-grove (not far from the regular grove) with a question. "Sandy says that thunder and lightning aren't the same thing, and we don't believe her," Courtney started.

I could picture Sandy saying it with confidence and righteous condescension. "She's right. Lightning is the result of—"

Lizzie: "Okay, thank you. We don't need the long explanation."

Sandy and I were friends by proxy in 2006 and 2007. I even got to see her at the 2008 Pennsylvania Technology Student Association State Conference, where she finalized in Ag/Bio, Career, and Challenging Tech Issues. We were both nerds.

At camp, we were aloof from and taunted by our bunkmates. We didn't console each other as much as we could have. I secretly wanted to change that. That task had some setbacks in 2008. Kanye West and I shall tell how it soured.

*How could you be so cold/ as the winter wind when it breeze, yo?/  
Just remember that you talkin' to me, yo./ You need to watch the way you  
talkin' to me, yo. That grammar!*

At the second dance on Sunday, July 13, as music blasted and colorful lights shined from the basketball court, I was pacing all over, around the mini-grove, the grove, the trees, the paved paths, the rock paths, and the fences, looking for some way to occupy myself. I thought my purposeful aimlessness was going well, but there happened to be girls of Bunk Radcliffe wherever I went. On more than one occasion that evening, I was called a "stalker," which is such an irritating false accusation. I got a sudden migraine when I heard it from Sandy along the edge of the basketball court with that snarky smile like I've seen from her bunkmates.

I took exception to this foreboding rudeness. I rehearsed a conversation with Sandy in my synapses at 2 AM while everyone slept. I had no idea when or how I would initiate it.

Three or four evenings later, the five benches in the mini-grove were crowded, but Courtney and Maddie's bench was relatively open. I sat down

in the open space to Maddie's left. She turned her back to me. She and Courtney got really quiet and kept talking.

After thirty seconds of this, I said, "What?"

"None of your business, Josh," Courtney said.

"I'm right here."

Ron (from Bunk Villanova) and Minnie came from the next bench over. Sandy came with them.

Courtney: "We were having a private conversation."

Josh: "How was I supposed to know that?"

Ron, Minnie, Courtney, and Maddie argued with me on that question, asserting that I obviously should have known that they wanted to be left alone because Maddie had her back turned and because neither of them spoke to me. Now, trying to explain to me the logic of nonverbal social cues is like trying to explain to the average Westerner the logic of Chinese communism. As I ambled about, trying to explain myself, Minnie and Ron took my spot, and Sandy sat on the concrete edge on the other side.

Eventually, Sandy piped in, "Josh, you are so stupid."

*Here's my chance.* "We need to talk! You've been very rude to me, and I don't know why."

Minnie and Ron mocked me for my sudden assertiveness. Then somehow the topic changed in thirty seconds, and my objection was never addressed again. As they jabbered away about some hookups that had happened recently, I saw no way I could contribute to the conversation, so I turned around and walked back to Bunk St. Joe's in solitude.

*I am not stupid. An idiotic action doth not an idiot make, damn it! I am smart. Lower Merion School District thinks I'm gifted. I'm double advanced in math. My mom says I'm smart. I know I'm smart. She has to know I'm about as smart as she is when she's surrounded by the likes of Courtney, Maddie, Maddy, Lizzie, Minnie, Karen, and Mina every day. How dare she insult my intelligence? When was I ever mean to her?*

*I mean, after all the things that we been through, / I mean, after all the things we got into...*



I mean, we could have been closer friends and experienced more together. I think it was a combination of factors—boys' and girls' camp do most daytime activities separately, and I lacked social fluidity and courage, and she was seldom alone. Anyway, we were kind of through a lot: three summers, a TSA conference, and a few bar and bat mitzvahs, including hers. (She didn't go to mine.) I remember that day, February 3, 2007, which was also her thirteenth birthday. She didn't put me at her table with the other camp friends; she put me at the cousins table so I could sit next to her cousin, also named Josh, because she thought we would get along well because "you're both really smart," as she explained, which was true, but he wasn't a *Harry Potter* fan, so we didn't have much intellectual to talk about.

*Hey yo, I know o' some things that you ain't told me.*

This grammatical violation of a line was manifested in an interesting way, on Wednesday, July 9. The evening activity was a scavenger hunt with a list the counselors made of thirty-something items for each bunk to find. Among these items were "a CD," "a flashlight that uses D batteries," "a size 36 B-cup bra," "a batting helmet," and "something of Sandy Cohen's." I imagined that some bunks were raiding her bed area and that others were badgering her to borrow stuff. I really didn't want her to be bothered any more than she had to, so I pulled out my iPod, which I had synced with contacts on Outlook, where I had put a bunch of phone numbers I had collected at the camp reunion at Dave and Buster's a year and a half ago (January 9, 2007). I wrote down on loose leaf paper, "Sandy Cohen's phone number/ 610-555-1922". This was accepted in the final tallying.

Later that night, when I sat in the grove on a bench facing away from the dining hall, Sandy and Minnie came up to me. "Where did you get my phone number?"

"You gave it to me at the reunion."

"No, I didn't."

"Yeah, you did. It wasn't at the last one, it was at the... at the... the one between the summer of 2006 and two thou—the one between the summers of 2006 and 2007."

She insisted she didn't, but somehow I had her number, and I hadn't asked anyone but her.

*Hey yo, I did some things, but that's the old me.*

In the fourth week of camp, I vowed to not eavesdrop anymore, and I would tell that proudly to anyone who cared to listen—I mean—anyone who was within five feet. In the week between Visiting Day and Color War, I had a smooth time. On Thursday, July 31, I figured I should tell Sandy how I got her number. When I searched for her around 9:30 PM, I heard she was inside sleeping. I walked back to my cabin, pondering if Sandy had narcolepsy like my mom, and tore a 5" by 8.5" verdant lined sheet of paper from my notebook and wrote on it exactly what happened. I went back to the grove and tried to find a friend of hers to pass along the note. I found Dani, a close friend of Sandy's in Bunk Vassar, and just as she agreed and took the note from my hand, Sandy Cohen walked up from behind wearing sunglasses (something was up with her eyes that summer). So Sandy and Dani read the note silently in front of me.

"It was in that room where everyone gathers at the end and where they do the raffle. You were sitting next to someone from Bunk Michigan at the time, now Bunk Miami [the other boys' bunk for our age group]. I forget who it was. I was sitting in the chair in front of you backwards kneeling with my butt on my heels so that I could see you. I remember saying something along the lines of, 'I now have a cell phone. Can I have your phone number?' I remember that you didn't wait for me to get out my phone and start a new contact, that you just went ahead and said it. So that is how I have your phone number."

Sandy looked up. "I don't remember that happening."

"Look, I didn't ask anyone else for your number. You can ask anyone you gave your phone number to."

Sandy stared at me through her sunglasses.

"Whom *did* you give your number to that day?"

"Um... I gave it to Donny."

Dani jumped in, "Maybe it was that you gave your number to Donny, and Josh thought you were talking to him!"

Dani was on to something that vindicated me. I got excited. "Yeah! I think that's what happened!"

Sandy agreed, and that issue was put to rest.

*And now you wanna get me back, and you gon' show me,/ so you walk around like you don't know me./ You got a new friend. Well, I got homies,/ but in the end, it's still so lonely.*

We were never in a relationship, and there was no "new friend" for Sandy. In Herman's absence, I didn't have any true friends that summer. Without homies, I think I was lonelier than Kanye West. I think the closest I came to friendship was when I was with counselors, and even then, I was somehow more mature than they were, and I never told them that I liked Sandy. I tried to hide it from everyone, in fact, by telling people that I liked a girl at school named Natalie Jones. (Natalie gave me permission to do this.)

I don't know if people bought that bullshit, but it was certainly helpful in some situations. Lindsay from Bunk Wellesley came up to me once when I sat alone on a bench in the grove to the left of the big tree, and she proceeded to hit on me for some reason I can only guess—a dare, maybe. If she weren't pretending, anyone in my bunk except her younger brother Warren would have happily been in my situation, but I dismissed her confessions of deep love to me by staring off in the distance and iteratively explaining that my heart lay with Natalie Jones and that I wasn't interested.

*How could you be so Dr. Evil?*

Now, people had been pairing up Sandy and me for as long as she had been at camp. In fact, on the evening when I first met Sandy in 2006, just before the evening activity started, I overheard Peter say to someone, "Josh and Sandy should get together." I had no idea who she was then, not even a few minutes later when she stumped me on *Harry Potter* trivia.

On the night of July 11, 2008, someone Fred from Bunk Temple asked Sandy in front of me, "Would you ever go out with Josh Hoffman?"

Sandy's response: "I think I'd rather kill myself."

I said, "Now I'm a little insulted!" I repeated those exact words in the same tone over and over for twenty seconds until I was sure that Sandy had registered it, as if that mattered.

*You're bringin' out a side o' me that I don't know.*

Earlier that night, I was my usual morally superior self when I was trying to explain to people—who didn't really give a shit—why “gay” should not be an insult and why being gay is not wrong. I was called “faggot” a few times in that conversation, but I persisted.

Sandy walked up to the bench by the tree in the grove. The light from the street lamps reflected off her sunglasses and wouldn't let me see her eyes. “I'm a lesbian.”

My eyes and breathing betrayed my panic, though I kept a nonchalant face. “Really?”

“No.”

*I decided we weren't gon' speak, so/ why we up 3 AM on the phone?*

We weren't allowed to have cell phones at camp. The camp owner explained once that it had to do with some liability insurance policy. I did, however, do deep thinking at 3 AM.

Anyway, as the summer progressed, the following reputation had been created for me—at least, I don't think *I* created it: I was a stalker who stalked Sandy Cohen. So whenever I was incidentally within five feet of Sandy, one of her bunkmates would call me out as if I had done something wrong. She didn't want to speak to me in any friendly way. Where I once delighted in making eye contact with her, I feared to even look in her direction.

*Why does she be so mad at me fo'?* Dear God, please send an English teacher in Kanye West's direction.

I tried to find out what Sandy might be saying about me (if anything) when I wasn't there or what could be her reasons for acting like she did to me. I couldn't get much information by trying to ask subtle questions of her bunkmates, and Dani didn't know anything.

*Homie, I don't know. She's hot and cold.*

Color War broke with fireworks over the lake and, per Camp Kinebig tradition, a big flaming sign that read, “WAR.” We all crowded onto the basketball court and were sorted into Blue Cavemen and White Spacemen,



the former of which both Sandy and I were placed on. We lined up with our divisions and sat down on the basketball court.

Sandy was about three feet from me. "Hey, Josh."

"Yes, Sandy?"

"If you bother me at all during Color War, I'm going to kick you in the balls."

I didn't want to believe what I heard, so I asked her, "Can you repeat that?"

"If you bother me at all during Color War, I'm going to kick you in the balls."

*Such a cute psychopath.*

*I won't stop, won't mess my groove up/ 'cause I already know how this thing goes.*

Actually, the opposite of that happened. I had no groove to begin with, so I couldn't really mess that up. Also, I wasn't quite as clairvoyant as Kanye West. I kept trying to act like Sandy was still my friend.

I carried to a Color War fight song practice an article my parents had sent me announcing that *Tales of Beedle the Bard* would be released in bookstores in December. I strategically sat a few feet in front of Sandy.

As more of the Blue team piled in, I turned around to her and said, "You're still a *Harry Potter* fan, right?"

She nodded.

"Look." I handed her the article, which she unfolded, read, and handed back to me without saying a word.

I took this moment as a sign that things could get better.

*You run and tell your friends that you're leavin' me./ They say that they don't see what you see in me.*

I am curious to know what role Bunk Radcliffe played in the transformation of Sandy Cohen. I won't hold it against anyone; nothing can be changed now. I really just want to know.

At the beginning of the summer, when Courtney, Karen, and Maddie were sunbathing during free swim, Courtney asked, "You like Sandy Cohen, don't you?"

"What would make you think that?"

I got no answer, so I thought I successfully brushed off the notion.

*Just wait a couple months, then you gon' see, / you'll never find  
nobody better than me.*

Well, I don't like to brag, but... Okay. That's a lie. I do like to brag. Have I mentioned yet that I'm smart? Sandy seemed to me a female version of myself. I can't say whether she will ever find any better match for herself than I, but I can say for sure that she could not have found and will not find him or her at camp.

*Talkin' talkin' talkin' talk. / Baby, let's just knock it off. / They don't  
know what we've been through. / They don't know 'bout me and you.*

That talk I was planning in my head just kept needing more and more content appended. There would be no way that Sandy and I would have any oral conflict resolution, for the conflict in question prevented it. My mental health had ebbed away by the last week, but I had two remaining assets: bravery and writing skills. Starting at around 3 AM on the morning of Sunday, August 10, I scratched out a letter to her. I listed my grievances, using both sides entirely of the notebook page. I called her a bitch at the top of the second page. I regret that now because of the sexist connotations, not because I didn't mean it. I postulated that she thought I was stalking her because she thought I liked her. I told her that she need not fear me because I was not obsessed with her because, as I had explained a hundred times before, my heart lay with someone at school named Natalie Jones. This argument made perfect sense, except that it was full of shit. I folded up this letter, sealed it in an envelope, and marked the envelope, "Sandy Cohen." Right after breakfast, I sneaked into the mail room and dropped it in Bunk Radcliffe's box.

That night, I asked Sandy if she had received my letter.

Lizzie answered for her, "There's no mail on Sundays."

So I waited. There was a carnival on Monday, August 11, just as there always is on the third-to-last day of camp, with an inflatable obstacle course, a dunk tank, one of those games where people knock over a stack of cups with a wiffleball, a kissing booth, and a table with pipe cleaner rings and

pretend marriage certificates that say, “\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have been joined in the union of holy matrimony and must express this by holding hands for the next two weeks.”

Maddy told me at the carnival, “We read your letter.”

“We”! I wasn’t expecting that Sandy would keep the letter to herself. I didn’t really give a shit anymore.

I met Dani and Sandy near an empty table loaded with pretend marriage certificates. I didn’t really say anything to them, nor they to me. Dani took one of the certificates and wrote, “Josh Hoffman” on the first blank and on the other, “San—”

Sandy yanked the pen out of Dani’s hand, shouting, “You bitch!”

I hope Sandy didn’t see my smile.

That night was the Cabaret, the final dance of the summer where the kitchen staff served their highest quality fried chicken sandwiches with fries and ketchup in the grove and decorated the basketball court according to the year’s Cabaret theme, which was Broadway in 2008, so there were painted depictions of *Mamma Mia!*, *West Side Story*, *Hairspray*, *Rent*, and *High School Musical*. Girls broke out their most expensive dresses for Cabaret. Sandy’s was red.

While she was in line for dinner, I seized the opportunity. “So... did you read my letter?”

“Yes.”

“And...”

“Everything you said in that letter was wrong.”

She was wrong to say, “everything.” Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I just came clean with everything and wrote a totally sincere letter. I wish I had.

Anyway, I got a migraine two hours later and spent the rest of the evening in the cabin.

*So I got somethin’ new to see,/ and you just gon’ keep hatin’ me,/ and we just gon’ be enemies.*

Camp Kinebig has this tradition of giving “excel” trophies on the second-to-last day of the summer, Tuesday, August 12. Every person gets

one for succeeding in something, and each trophy is personalized—to an extent. They usually screwed me over on this one, for they seemed to always pick out the accomplishments from a cookie cutter list of activities already provided at camp. Not once have I ever received an excel trophy in *Harry Potter* trivia. In 2008, my excel trophy was in soccer and volleyball, which made no sense whatsoever. So I concocted a joke. It went like this: “I won my excel trophy in soccer and eavesdropping, which is weird because I’m no good at soccer.” There were an absurd accomplishment and an inversion of the expected, a decent two-punch inside joke.

There is this ceremony called 3-5-10 where campers and staff who had been with Camp Kinebig for three or more years gave sentimental speeches as the whole camp gathered around the lake. People usually hugged each other after the speeches. It was in the hugging period that I went over to Sandy, in mid-hug, whom I thought would be the perfect audience for this joke. “Hey, Sandy, I won my excel trophy in soccer and—”

“I don’t care!”

I heard the song “Heartless” for the first time on the December 13, 2008 episode of *Saturday Night Live*. I was under a blanket on a cozy couch in the basement, but I got chills for the whole three and a half minute performance.

*I know you can’t believe/ I could just leave it wrong,/ and you can’t make it right./ I’m gon’ take off tonight/ into the night...*

The camp reunion was held at Dave and Buster’s, of course, on Sunday, January 11, 2009. Herman was not there, either. For perhaps the first time, I looked at Sandy Cohen and truly appreciated her beauty. I didn’t say that out loud, of course. I did say something else stupid out loud and another stupid thing in writing. So here’s how I ran my mouth that day.

Dustin mentioned casually that he didn’t like his phone. Ten minutes later, he accidentally dropped his phone, at which point he hollered and ran after it.

Sandy said, “You said that you didn’t like your phone, so maybe you could have just let it...” Her voice trailed off.



No one responded to that thought. I didn't want her to feel like no one was listening, so I said, "Sandy, that's a great idea. I think I'll hire a hitman to shoot my iPod—"

"I wasn't talking to you! Where the hell did you come from?!"

I mumbled something along the lines of, "My mother's womb." I walked off.

The raffle started an hour later. Sandy won a Camp Kinebig blanket, and she said, "I won the blanket last year!" as she got out of her seat to claim it.

My mind went to work. The prizes are probably given out in the same order each year. Sandy's father Dr. Cohen probably arrived at around the same time this year as he did last year, and that probably affected the position in which her name was placed in the box, and the slip was drawn by the same hand. I just *had* to get these thoughts out, so I texted 610-555-1922, "You know, there mathematical reasoning behind you winning the blanket two years in a row." This was really dumb, especially considering that I forgot to include the word "is" after "there."

Sandy responded, "who the hell is this and stop texting me!!! actually just delete this number from your phone because there's only 1 person who would say that."

That night, I watched the Golden Globes in the basement. When the ceremony was over, I turned off the TV and began to go back upstairs. I stopped on the fourteenth of twenty steps.

*Sandy Cohen was the only reason I returned to camp last summer.  
How did that work out?*

I climbed up two more steps.

*Really, why should I be focusing my energies on her?*

I climbed up two more steps.

*Fuck Sandra Ann Cohen.*

I climbed the last two steps out of the basement.

I celebrate on January 11 every year.

---

Packs of Cigarettes

We were  
strangers with desperate cravings  
to construct little bonds  
We interpreted  
twisted faces as hope  
of personalities that correspond.  
So we focused lazy eyes  
to squint in the moonlight  
to grasp hold of their  
attention-if just for the night.  
And struck up conversations  
like matches,  
billowing out all brands of words  
to form some attachments.  
So that when puffs of smoke fogged our days,  
we wouldn't have any words  
we'd rather rephrase.  
Yet there are empty  
packs of cigarettes,  
abandoned throughout,  
lost on nights drawn out  
like melodies from string quartets.  
To wake up in the morning with  
memories scarred on our skin like ash  
Mulling over the last chat we had before  
we spent all our cash  
Bumming it and bumming off of each other's thoughts to relive  
Of anything we could take and everything  
we were willing to give

Pleading with the stars in our eyes  
that we wouldn't end up just a product  
of an empty pack's demise,  
So we stow away all it is  
about ourselves we despise.

But our secrets have a way of spilling themselves.

We end up packing moments  
like cigarettes  
in our back pocket  
And holding hands with people we met

now coerced to commit.  
Surrendering, we dance across the melody the night chose  
carrying on by the light of a street lamp's glow,  
to smoke through the nights,  
one by one  
remembering all we can  
as long as when it is done  
we are somewhere different  
from where we began.

Sonnet

If we're of what we're made, such as we be,  
not having names to call what calls our souls  
And if this work is good, as far we see  
Then of all toll full blind take up your call.  
Should course direct amiss of aims foreseen  
Then t'was pure sight misgave the truer view,  
As fixéd stones confound the broadest ken  
Or blooms, May-soft, may trample thou.  
It is the Maker, then, that making brings  
And but our place to grow and gain 'gainst time  
To love the lithe of lately lathéd things  
And lovingly give to all reason rhyme—  
For thou, lambent, and kindly bending ear  
Hath wrought me fully well as thou art near.



## Outside King of Steaks

There you sit, I am,  
on the ledge against the window pane.  
Above your head are words  
burning in the beguiling rain.

*King of Steaks*, I read watching you,  
seeing this scene.

You're not on your knees  
in honor of him.

You don't believe in him.  
But that's not the point.

I look and see  
you're breaking thin.  
Eyes are bloodshot red.  
You are overdosing  
again.

Your white knit hat sticks  
to the fingerprinted smoke  
stained glass.

We've come here  
every Sunday night.  
Like Church goers flocking  
to mass. That hat  
matches the powder you snorted  
through my last  
ten dollar bill.

The sign above you  
masks your skin  
in yellow, pink, and blue  
but your paleness seeps through.  
You're sickly praying for saving.  
In pain it's me you're blaming.

Your red patch jacket, I've worshiped  
for ages, falls off your angel wing shoulder.  
You're fading like the smoke inside  
the window. You don't look nineteen,  
you look a thousand years older.

I catch you as you pitch forward  
off the inch of ledge. My fingers  
brush sticky warmth. Your nose  
has bled.

I know I am losing you now.  
I know as the cement grit  
grinds into my knees hard.  
Rain off the Red Roof Inn  
burns my cheeks. Tears  
in the water dissolve  
like your life half alone.  
I'm not crying.  
I'm frostbitten numb.

You jerk from my grip.  
You slip from my fingertips.  
The blood from your nose  
covers your once icy pink lips.  
You stop shaking  
when the thunder hums.  
I had to laugh though.  
Because the ambulance  
our King of steaks called  
has finally come.

## Obstinence

This is the crux

And the periphery.

Is this a crossroads, or will we stay the same course as if we wear blinders?  
Will these changes be the changes that change us, or will this cryptic bull shit  
be a slight blink in the strength of his stare?

We will have these talks and it will not matter what bed we are in or what we  
are wearing or who we kissed that day. He will probe deep and I will shrink,  
retract my tender claw from his light.

And his eyes will always mist when I giggle at his light arm rubbings. And he  
will continue on.

This is stunted? I am stunted? He is on a war path for love and I am a  
casualty; no but the force with which he swings his red sword fells not me but  
his own heart. My refusals draw him closer, my reversals win his faith. He is  
not someone I want to damage. He has lain in my bed. He has seen my  
colossal destruction; borne the weight of it gracefully and with only one door  
slam. His coping mechanisms magnificent, his loyalty unwavering.

All this does is induce giggling, simpers tripping his steps up the crag of my  
walls.

His capable hands find holds without hurting me, his smile thaws me  
painfully.

I seek no trust, no permanent hand to hold. I laugh in the face of his divinity.  
I grimace at his warmth. I cannot find a tear in my briny abyss to cry for him  
or even for me. So I will stay dark as he shines.

The path is questionable and the air is thick with laughter and sweat. With  
full air, full with the hidden doubt and frustration. *Humid* with his unshed  
tears. The viscosity of this slit between us is creeping. It is slowly dripping  
and crystallizing and it is in my pipes. I can taste it and feel it in the motion  
of my stride.

He will force something good from me. He has ventured into me with his torch and has been unsuccessful in his searchings, save for some encrusted shiny things that glow and spark on the surface – revealing a deep vein of the stuff. But these are streaks. These are accidents, fingernail scratchings. He forgot the dynamite.

Where would we be without love?

I can show you.

I can show you the place he left with a low head.

Still, he keeps the map.



## Railway

He would have to take the train now. He'd never taken a train before, and now he was expected to take it further out than he'd ever gone. He rarely drove, and did his shopping online, getting his groceries delivered. He liked fast food but, between the health risks, and the three separate times he'd have to talk to (likely) three different people in the line, he rarely ate it. Mostly he sat at home, ordered his necessities, and made his art.

He made beautiful art. Big, draped canvases filled with old materials: oils, paints, charcoals and graphites and india ink. He made splatter works that frightened with bright colors, yellows and blues and greens. Inside these splatters, there would stand what looked like an entirely different portrait, a charcoal sketch of a woman, or a deeply detailed ballpoint rendering of Mt. Vesuvius's skyscape, perfect to scale within the canvas.

He never exhibited these pieces, only put them up online through various blogs and forums. Word got around quickly though, the quality was so good, the stuff so original. People would send him messages telling them how they'd look at his work and see two different pieces so clearly that it was like their eyes were independent. They said their senses would stop working together. Some would start smelling old memories, apparently, completely incongruent with the piece or their surroundings. They would start smelling the beach, or would hear themselves getting yelled at by their kindergarten teacher. One person said he looked at the man's first Blue/Yellow work online, enjoyed it well enough, and then got back to work. But when he went to write his hand couldn't make letters, not until he tried the other hand. Some lady learned French from studying the man's oeuvre, though she'd seen them all from Michigan.

Some were frightened, some vomited, some were thankful. Some were simply moved to tears, immediately, and then would stop just as quickly once they looked away. Word spread. The man knew this was so when someone responded to his online grocery order with a full waiver. "*My wife and I thank you for marrying us,*" read the PM.

Word spread faster, and turned to offers from professionals who were willing to offer him large sums of money “to keep doing, essentially what you’re doing.”

“You’ll be able to stay at home, just the same. We’ll even start paying for the food delivery, and anything you were going out for we can cover from here on. You’ll be able to stay inside and do whatever it is you like to do to make your stuff.” They said.

Only condition was, they said, that he would have to come out to come prove he was...well, real, they said.

“See,” the man chuckled as he tried to start his sentence over the phone, “nobody here is sure you’re even one guy, or that this isn’t some widespread internet prank.”

“I’m not sure of that either,” the man said.

“Well, how’s about your come on down and check things out and get a feel for things. You come down here -- we have massive studios -- and we’ll sync up; see if we gel. We have some of the major contemporary artists commissioned her. Canvases, paints, all the materials and more. Proverbial candy store, everything you could ask for.”

“A what candy store? You were talking too fast.”

“A whaddya say? Come check it out.” They said. “We can promise an exhibition, and I can even promise that you won’t have to be there, and that the money will be good enough to ensure that we can do all I’ve promised you.”

The man chewed the side of his mouth, and didn’t say anything.

“I’ll be taking that silence as a yes. We expect you at 1:00 on Friday. All the best.”

And so Friday came. It had begun smoothly. He woke early, clear-minded and ahead of his alarm (though he credited a lot of this to nerves), and dressed quickly in the clothes he’d laid out the night before. He’d laid out a small breakfast too, knowing he’d be too panicked to have much of an appetite, and he’d left a highlighted train schedule, along with a pre-

purchased ticket and the address of the place he was to go to, bulletined to his cork board next to the fridge. He collected a series of his prints that he'd rolled up and rubber banded, and headed out the door.

He'd arrived fifteen minutes early, and sat at the platform. At intervals he looked to either side of the railway, wondering which side the train would be coming from. Finally it screamed in from the left, and he got on, taking a seat near the back of the car and behind a woman in scrubs.

The train was packed, and as it started back up the sounds of its gears slurred in with the sounds of everyone talking, until all was useless clanging. The man grimaced, and he rocked back and forth. The woman turned around and lent him a soft smile.

"First time on a train?"

"Yes."

"I have to take this train every day. The noise used to bother me too, but you ride it long enough and something happens. You start to hear all these things differently. Don't worry about trying to separate all these sounds; they'll just seem even louder and more uncontrollable. Relax and look out the window and it'll all suss itself out. And you'll see that whomever you smile to and chat up comes through clearer than all the rest."

"Hmm."

"Most interesting of all," the woman went on, "is what'll happen when you keep taking the train past three months. Eventually that white noise becomes so separate that it becomes distinct. Like the white noise is its own part of the ride. Something you can identify and compartmentalize."

"But compartmentalize isn't the right word," she backtracked, "it's, it's that it becomes so distinct that you can't handle when it's not there. And in fact the whole balance between relevant and irrelevant conversations becomes so delicate that if someone you usually smiled at and talked to stops show up, then things get thrown off. Very hollow, when that happens. The sounds overwhelm again."

The man looked at her and said nothing. Other conversations started

to bleed in. The train squealed in slowing to a stop.

"But," she said, "by the fifth month you feel a new pattern start to take shape and set into habit. So you learn to wait peacefully."

"I'm only taking the train this once," the man said.

"Oh." She tried to flash up a light smile. "Well, this is my stop. Hope the rest of the ride goes better for you." She brushed her hand across his as she left. As the train started up again and the noise swelled over, the man took her advice and looked out of the window. He looked around outside, but mostly it was his reflection he stared at. From his suburban home the train rode into the city, so with each stop the surroundings grew more brick layered and less foliaged. Glauston, the first stop, was trees and streets; Fort Sailview, less the first and more the second. And so on, until the last hills of Wrenside shuffled into rooftops that lay level with the rail line, and the sun beamed complete.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Someone asked from the seat behind.

"Oh, yeah. I suppose so." The man responded with a quick glance and then looked back out the window. It was a guy who'd asked the question, young and with spotty facial hair.

"Oh I'd say so completely. The way those last two hills fall away and the sunlight just *crests* over those roofs. How those little turnstile air vents whirl endlessly, I ride this train all the time and I've never known what they're there for, but you see that, right? I've never seen them stop. How with each whirl the sunlight just slicks off the cusp of the curled metal. You can almost hear it when you see it, like one blade being sharpened off another."

"You got all that from those?" The man asked.

"I'm a poet. Plus, like I said, I'm on this train a lot."

"There's money left in poetry?"

"Oh no, none at all. That's why I write for myself."

"So who's to say you're a poet other than yourself?"

"Well, no one."

"Then who am I to listen to?" The man asked. "How do you ever



know?"

The poet sneered. "Well *fuck you*, then." And he moved a car up. The man didn't know what to say. He sat silently and watched the poet walk away. The train bounced hard, and the man's stomach became uneasy. He tried to look out the window but the train was moving too fast and the blurring scenery made him queasier. So the man looked forward into the car the poet sat in. The poet started shooting glances back, but the man didn't notice; he was looking past the poet, steadily and at nothing so as to soothe his stomach. The poet stood up and slid the car door open.

"Look, do we have a problem?" The poet asked.

"What?" Asked the man. He snapped his head awake, pulled from some reverie.

"You think I don't know you were just staring at me?"

"But I wasn't. You can go back to your seat. I was just staring."

"Who the --?" The poet held his arms open and swiveled, expressing to no one in particular *is-this-guy-for-real?*

"Please just go back. I didn't mean to --"

"To what? To stare at me? You insult me and then stare at me just to fuck with me, and now you're telling me what to do. I don't believe this."

"I'm sorry. it's just you told me to fuck off and then my stomach started hurting from not having anyone to talk to because the sound on here has gotten all delicate and out of balance --"

"What are you --" The poet leapt at the man and began to throttle him. The poet snarled and the man choked. The man's arms groped about the seats, and then grabbed hold of the poet's arms, but the man was older and weaker.

"*Pleakk.*" said the man. "*I can't...*"

"I'll bet you can't, you, you." The poet could hardly breathe himself. Still tightening his grip around the man's throat, he threw him against the window and then dragged him into the aisle.

"Just don't touch my, give me my..." Said the man.

"Huh, what was that?" asked the poet. "Sorry? Whatever you want now, I swear to God..."

"Please just give me my paintings."

"What?"

The man pointed to his rubber banded prints. "Right there."

"Oh, done a little bit of painting, have you? Well who says you're a painter?"

"I don't know, someone on the phone who wanted to pay me for these."

The poet kicked him in the stomach. Bloody spittle slicked the ground as the man hacked.

"Just please, please look."

"Oh I'll look. I'm going to look at your retarded little paintings, and I'm going to tear these to pieces like how you tore me down. He tore off the rubber band and unfurled the roll. On the top was Blue and Yellow #1. There was thin silence, just a slice of a second, as the man's eyes tracked both portraits, independent, and then pulled them together. The poet began to choke, and then gag. Then he just sobbed. He buckled to his knees and fell where the man was still silently gasping. The poet began to heave, logged with tears, and he fell on top of the man.

"That's all I was trying to say," wept the poet, and he hugged the broken man on the ground. The poet repeated the line every time he could find another breath, and for a long time the two men sat there, missing what stops they were supposed to get off at to share what thin air they each had.

*Presto agitato*

(Or, a Slight Error in Pronunciation)

"Ladies and gentlemen," the velvet-throated voice announces soothingly—if such terms can be used—"the Iowa State Theatre of Arts proudly presents, *Beethoven by Moonlight*, with world-renowned concert pianist, Matthew Beels-saw-ski.

God, how I hate that imbecile. I hate everything about him. That imitation-George Takei tone, that stupid emphasis he puts on the word "renowned," the way he's never, not even once, said my last name properly—it's Bielszowski, *Beel-Shov-Skee*, for Christ's sake. But no, don't listen to the man himself when he tries to tell you after every performance—*four times* he's tried to get you to fix it, and yet you go on pronouncing it however the hell you want! Well, if you insist on being a pretentious imbecile, that's fine by me.

I dab the tiny oceans of sweat forming on my forehead with my pale linen handkerchief. I stand adjacent to the monstrous curtains as they sway uneasily back and forth.

I've got to start beginning my pre-concert routine *before* he announces me; that stupid voice of his just puts me out of whack. Now I forget whether I've touched the bottoms of my shoes three times, or four, like I'm supposed to.

Thanks a lot, dipshit. Now I have to start over.

The applause ebbs. Silence. I fiddle with my glasses.

I have a very specific pre-performance routine. After so many years, you'd think it'd pretty much be second nature. But tonight, my mind just keeps blanking. It's that damn announcer's voice. He's throwing me off.

Okay, let's try this again, shall we? Blink twice, touch left shoe with right hand, right shoe with left hand, blink again, lick thumbs (right, then left), lick middle fingers (left one first, then right), tap left foot twice, tap—Wait! Did I lick my right middle finger first? *Fuck!* Gotta start over...

The syrupy voice starts up again: “Uh...here he is—Matthew Beel-zow-ski.”

Beel-zow-ski? *BEEL-ZOW-SKI?!*

I’ll kill him. I swear to God, if it’s the last thing I do, I’m going to *kill* that pretentious bastard.

Doesn’t he realize that I am *THE* Matthew Bielszowski—voted second-best classical performer in three years in a row by the *Midwestern Cultural Review*, opened for Yo-Yo Ma at Brookside Elementary School, appeared on the cover of *Pianist Magazine* twice—*twice!* How often have *you* made the cover of *Pianist*, Jim? Yeah, that’s what I thought.

Besides, it’s not as though my name’s that challenging. Bielszowski. *Beel-Shov-Skee*—it’s a beautiful name, Hebrew for “favorite daughter” or whatever—plus, I happen to share it with the great German literary historian Albert Bielszowski. I mean, come on! How many people can claim *that*?

But Mr. Fancy Announcer doesn’t care. He’s far too busy being a pretentious idiot and interrupting my perfect routine.

I oughta kill him.

Wait—yes! That’s it! I’ll kill him! I’ll do myself and the whole world a favor and just *kill* the bastard!

“MATTHEW BILL-ZAW-SKI?”

Would you calm the fuck down, imbecile? Plotting your assassination here.

See what I mean? He’s insufferable.

Now, then—blink twice, touch this hand with that hand—wait—*Fuck!* Wrong hand. Start over—um, blink twice, touch *THIS* hand with *THAT* hand, touch foot—no, wait—SON OF A BITCH!

Crap. That wasn’t supposed to be out loud.

“Matt, what the hell?”

My manager, Todd, has slinked in through the backstage door.

“What on *earth* are you doing?! Didn’t you hear Jim announce you—you’re *on*.”



Soft, nervous murmurs rise from the platoons of seats beyond. I hear several of them being emptied.

“Matt!”

“Umm...what?”

“Cut this shit out, Matt! You’re *on*—they’re waiting for you right now!”

“I...umm...I—”

“What?!”

“I’m...uh...I’m...thinking—”

“Well, you don’t have *time* to think! Get out there!”

“Uh...er...”

I’m gonna kill Jim. That bastard’s as good as dead. I’ll march right up those stairs to that balcony, tear open that fat, pretentious stomach of his, rip out his intestines, and—

“MATT!”

“WHAT?!”

“Jesus Christ, Matt, what is *wrong* with you tonight?”

Todd steps back; I know what he’s going to say before his mouth opens:

“Do I need to call Frank and have him talk to you again?”

Oh, *God*, no. *Not* Frank. I already have to put up with his shit twice a week. What a prick that guy is. Always telling me how I’m “not functioning properly,” how I have some “unhealthy mental condition,” how I’ve got all these problems—*compulsions*, he calls them, putting a disgusting emphasis on the second syllable. *God*, what a prick.

“You’re a very nice, very intelligent young man, Matt,” he’ll always say. “You’ve just got a few bugs that need worked out.”

Shut up. Just shut up and stop talking about me like I’m some poorly constructed computer. You detestable prick—sitting there with that damn master’s degree you bought on eBay over your head. Think you’re pretty goddamn smart, don’tcha, Frank? Well, I say you’re an idiot. I mean—why

should I talk to *you*? What would *you* know about murdering an ugly, pretentious imbecile so fat he can't see his own—?

"MATT!"

"Huh?"

"Matt—you—*aaarrggghh!*"

He buries his face in his hands, trying desperately to resist the urge to tear my head off.

"I've had enough of this." He produces his shiny white iPhone with the stupid baby blue cover. "I'm calling Frank."

Very well, then. But I warn you—you only waste your time calling that prick.

The hushed murmurs have transformed into a dull roar. I am a Yosemite Falls of perspiration.

Paul—the venue owner—has stepped onstage, the shadow of his long thin body enveloping the audience. "Uh, sorry for the delay, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Bielszowski is, uh, having some technical difficulties—he'll, uh, be onstage in just a moment."

False. I refuse to set one foot on that stage until that announcer ceases his adamant idiocy and permits me to finish this damned routine in peace. God, what an asshole. I can't wait to watch him die. Reminds me of my father—fat, drunken bastard.

"Frank, it's Todd. Matt's acting all weird again. He's here at his concert—he's got to go on now, but he won't—he's sweating like crazy, and he's *really* jumpy. What? Yeah, probably didn't take his medication this morning."

You're damn right I didn't. It doesn't help me at all with these "com-PUHL-zhuns" from which Frank claims I suffer. It just makes me nauseous. And believe me, the *last* thing I need at a time like this is an upset stomach.

Upset stomach. Upset. Stomach...

I glance onstage to see the throngs of concertgoers crammed into their seats. Clearly, if these people don't start hearing some Beethoven, they're gonna burn this place to the ground.

Upset...stomach...indigestion...

Above the whole scene sits Jim. Seated in his throne on high, peering down over his mic upon the mere mortals below, with the faintest smidgen of a grin on his thick, rubbery face.

*Yes, yes, ye forsaken souls, wallow in thine agony, as I watch from above, amused by thy pathetic cries, and all the while earning \$28,000 a year.*

Detestable bastard. I should have taken him out *years* ago.

I think I'll poison his broiled rockbass. But what poison shall I use—arsenic? No, too dense. Polonium? Cyanide—yes, cyanide. That's it. Or maybe—

"Matt, Frank wants to speak with you."

Up...set...stooooomaaacchh....iinndiiiiiiigesssstiiiiioonnnnn....

"C'mon, Matt, take the phone."

Mmmmf, I don't feel so good...

"Knock it off, Matt! Just take the damn phone!"

Oh, God.

"Matt? What's going on? Why are you—"

My knees hit the floor. Here it comes...

\*\*\*\*\*

*"For Christ's sake!"*

Todd stares. He can barely move.

I raise my head slightly from the floor. I let out a low, guttural moan and stare vacantly at the pasta salad I ate for dinner earlier tonight.

It happened again. I thought about having an upset stomach, and BOOM. Cue blowing of chunks. Happens quite often, actually.

I rise slowly, brush a semi-digested chunk of penne from the side of my face, stretch, sway back and forth a little. Am I dreaming?

Nope. I'm still at the prestigious Iowa State Theatre of the Arts in scenic downtown Des Moines—*home of the Iowa Symphony OARRR-chestrauuuuuh!*

Disquieted mumbles rise from the seats. A considerable amount of people have migrated to the rear exits.

I glance at my silver wristwatch. Five after eight. I've kept them waiting long enough.

Todd moves towards me nervously, touches my arm: "Matt, you okay—"

"GET THE FUCK OFF ME!"

Todd gets the fuck off me. His eyes have transformed into china plates.

I step out into the excruciating spotlight and stroll towards the glowing Bösendorfer. The rather diminished throng starts up its warm though confused applause.

But wait—I forgot the routine!

Exit, stage left.

The crowd gives voice to its shock. A massive crater forms under Todd's china plates.

Okay. Let's focus here.

Blink twice, touch left with right, yada yada yada—DONE! I actually did it. Probably didn't tap enough times, but no time to fix it now—

Applause resumes. Offstage, Todd swipes a ribbon of his sweat and my vomit from his brow. Paul stands near the exits, half glaring, half smiling.

What remains of the audience leans forward. An ocean of faces, breaths held, anticipating, waiting to see if this guy is worth the extra time it took him to get his ass out here.

Let us begin.

Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor "*Quasi una fantasia*," Op. 27, No. 2—commonly known as the *Moonlight Sonata*. Beautiful piece—and I can really play the hell out of it. As soon as



they hear those opening triplets, I've got them on a string, and I continue to reel them in. The glow from my watch flickers out like a beacon.

I don't like to see myself as a great pianist, though. Not as much as a very, *very* methodical one. When I was young, my mother made me practice piano every day—literally for hours. One mistake, and she'd hit my hand with a ruler and make me start over. You'd probably say I had what Frank calls a "dysfunctional family environment." I don't know about that—what I do know is she made me one hell of a pianist.

I continue pressing the ivory keys with surgical precision, no missed notes, not a single iota too fast or too slow. Perfection. One, two, three, one, two, three, CHORD CHANGE, two, three...

I make it through the *adagio sostenuto*. Now straight to the *allegretto*—*pling plingg, plingg plink! Plink plink! Plink plink!* I've got 'em now.

I'm not one to pat myself on the back—but *damn*, I'm good. I don't think I've felt this elated in my whole life. My face bursts into a wide grin. The watch beacon casts an astounding glow onto the face of the engrossed crowd.

Nothing could screw this moment up.

A brief, brief pause, and now for the icing on the cake—the *presto agitato*. "Very quick, with excitement."

And—*BAM!* My digits leap jubilantly across the keys, unleashing a relentless torrent of perfectly executed notes. The crowd leans forward to let the melodic typhoon wash over them.

I'm in heaven.

Then, from the outermost corner of my eye, I see Jim. Staring at me. Staring with those nasty little button eyes of his.

No. I can't let this happen. Not now. Tune him out.

But damn it, he's still watching. Staring. Burning gigantic holes into the side of my head with those hideous button eyes. I don't think I can do this—

NO! Must finish—must focus. I play even faster.

Goddamn it, I *still* see him. I can feel him breathing down my neck—in, out—in, out—ever so heavily, so slowly. *The fiend! He's trying to make me lose my tempo! I think I'm gonna barf again—*

*NO! I SHALL NEVER SURRENDER! BY STRENGTH SHALL I OVERCOME THE FOE! EXCELSIOOOOORRR!!!*

Heading into overdrive. My speed doubles—triples—my fingers are a blur—keys fall to the ground in terror. I am your master, O keys. Bow, bow before the terrible splendor of Matthew Sgrignoli!

I play faster—faster—smoke rises from the keyboard—*it's on fire!*

Yes, hahahahaaa! I have created FIRE! Rise, my flaming minions! Rise, and cast the evil one they call Jim into the fiery depths of HELL!

*Faster!* The sweat pours down in streams. The beacon is now a pillar of flame. I don't stop.

*Faster!* To hell with Jim. To hell with Todd, Frank, Paul, the audience—fuck them all. They don't exist—it's just me and my flaming piano. *Faster! FASTER!*

I'm playing at the speed of sound! The speed of light! I'm the Flash! I'm Roger Bannister! *I'm Speedy Fuckin' Gonzales!*

*FASTER! FASTER! FAAAASSSTERRRRRRRRR—*

*SNAP!*

Halfway up the ascending chromatic scale, something in the back of my brain goes *SNAP!*

I stop playing. Freeze.

My neck goes limp.

I slide forward off the bench, my knees smacking the illuminated wooden floor in the face. A devastating *crash!* as my head strikes the keys and flops to the floor, exchanging sweat for fresh blood.

As I lie there I can faintly hear the audience losing it.

*"Oh, my God!"*

*"Someone call 911!"*

*"Is there a doctor here?"*

*"Beating time, Matthew,"* growls my father's poltergeist.

*"Oh, God, he's not moving—I think he's dead!"*

I might as well be. This sucks.

This must be Jim's doing. I'm sure of it. It's as plain as those awful little button eyes on his fat, ugly face.

He's smiling at me. I just know it.

You win this round, you filthy bastard. But trust me—we *will* meet again.

Just as sure as my name is Matthew Bielszowski. *Beel-Shov-Skee*.  
And don't you dare forget it.

---

## Easier Said than Done

### Michelle

Michelle was certain that nobody from high school would recognize her now, if they were to run into her.

It wasn't that she looked so very different, although it had been a long time, and she'd put on some weight. She carried herself differently now. Her hair had been short, but now it hung defensively around her face and shoulders.

The coffee shop was still laid out exactly as it had been then, even if she didn't recognize any of the baristas anymore. She curled up in what had used to be her usual chair, nursing her latte and leaving her book open on her lap without really reading any of it.

When a man with a newspaper and a muffin occupied the seat next to her, it prompted a thrill of anxiety. There was an *etiquette* to the comfy chairs in a coffee shop. She'd claimed them, and now they were part of her personal bubble. His proximity made her hyperconscious of how she was sitting, the way her stomach pooched out, the pimple on the side of her chin closest to him. She wanted to let her hair swing down over her face, drawing a curtain over the little imperfections she felt certain that people judged her for. She could never quite shake the conviction that strangers pitied her for her looks.

"What are you reading?"

As close as his voice was, it took several long seconds of silence before Michelle realized he was talking to her. Her stomach clenched. Surely the question didn't indicate interest on his part; there had to be a host of more plausible reasons why someone would be talking to her. She imagined misconstruing the situation, and the inevitable red-faced apology--*oh, no, I didn't mean it like that--I didn't mean to give you the wrong idea*. It was dangerous to presume things.

And it was a loaded question, too, because literature was the kind of thing strangers judged you for. Classics were pretentious, bestsellers indicated a lack of imagination, magazines made you look dimwitted. The



book in Michelle's lap was one she'd reread a hundred times, because it was one of the only ones she'd let herself be seen with in public. She didn't know how to articulate that, if she *should* articulate that, and the clock was ticking. She had the squirming, panicked thought that the longer she ignored him, the more brilliant and sparkling and effusive her answer would need to be in order to make up for it.

"It's just a...thing," she mumbled. "It's sci-fi."

"Oh." The man gave her a thin not-quite smile, and turned his attention back to the paper.

### Adam

Ellie had said before she left that he sucked at relationships. She'd said it to hurt him, but he'd taken it at face value. Manipulation wasn't Adam's strong suit, and he was okay with that.

He missed her. Four years together was a long time, even in the big scheme of things, and maybe it was the routine that he missed more than anything, but that was still something. He felt off-balance, even after a few months of getting used to her absence. It was like having an inner-ear infection. Everything was just a little bit tilted, and things sounded foggy sometimes when he got distracted remembering her.

When he got to JoJo's, there was someone in his usual chair. There were two chairs, spaced respectably far apart, and it wasn't a hardship to take the left one instead of the right one. He *could* adapt, no matter how many people accused him of the contrary. The woman in the other one was staring off into space, her coffee barely touched, and Adam wasn't sure she'd even notice him.

She was cute, he thought. Sort of. It had been a while since he'd been at liberty to do anything about observations like that, but there was no reason now not to go out and talk to women. How many times had Brian told him that, with increasing frustration? "Get out there," he'd demanded, bodily

182

shoving Adam out the door, "and find the chick with the biggest boobs in the room, and ask her out. Just do it. For me. You'll be so much happier."

Adam thought there was probably a better way to go about it than that, but overall, it sounded like a pretty decent plan.

He was glad for the book in her lap. It was a convenient starting point. Everyone liked talking about books. "What are you reading?" he ventured, and it was a sincere question, because craning his neck to see the title hadn't worked.

It had been the most innocuous thing he could think of to ask, and yet it couldn't have been more obviously unwelcome, because the woman's only response was to turn her head away, her long black hair falling between them until Adam couldn't make out her profile anymore. He blinked, stung. Did he look threatening? Was she angry? He'd been trying to be *friendly*. She hadn't even been reading the thing. How could he have been bothering her?

"It's just a thing," he heard her mumble, effectively ending the conversation. Well then.

*You suck at relationships, Adam. Don't call me again.*

### Jess

God, thirty minutes until the end of her shift was going to be too much to handle. There were two friggin' people in the place, and JoJo's was dead enough on Tuesdays that she knew there probably weren't going to be any more for the rest of the night, and there was pretty much no reason on earth why she shouldn't be allowed to read a magazine behind the counter except that Mr. Bickford thought it was "antisocial" and "turned customers off."

Antisocial, her ass. Nobody came to a coffee shop to get chatty with the baristas. The customers didn't even want to be social with each other. The bitch with the cinnamon swirl latte hadn't even made eye contact with Jess, and she'd dropped her change and mumbled some kind of half-assed apology,

and she'd been holed up in the squishy chair in the darkest, most distant corner of the room for two hours now and *wouldn't leave*.

The tall guy with the pumpkin muffin had been friendlier. He hadn't been much for eye contact either, but he'd tipped pretty well, and his "thank you" had at least been audible. Jess winced in mock sympathy, watching him strike out. To be fair, his pick-up line had been kind of lame, but she didn't think he deserved *that* level of rudeness.

Some people just didn't know how to treat others. Some people were too caught up in their own little bubbles to bother with basic common courtesy. She'd asked her friend Julia about that once, because she knew people thought Julia was kind of a stuck-up bitch sometimes because she didn't talk much. It was her way, and Jess was used to it, but she'd asked once why Jules didn't just *try* to put herself out there and be social. It wasn't hard. It had to be better than hiding in a corner all the time, looking like just being around other people was medieval torture, making everyone glare at you because you were taking up the best seat in the cafe and wouldn't even share. Why would you go out at all if you weren't going to make the effort to enjoy yourself? Honestly, what was even the point?

Jules had shrugged. She'd been quiet for a while, avoiding eye contact, until Jess had wondered if she'd drifted off into daydreaming or something. Finally, she'd said "It's easier said than done." She had paused, as if about to elaborate, but then seemed to think better of it, or maybe she'd just been unable to.

Some people, Jess thinks. They don't make any friggin' sense.

---

Coffee Grinds

I'm not afraid.  
I'm not afraid that  
I read stop for go. That  
I chose today not tomorrow.  
That I can't handle this  
Hardship. That everything doesn't  
Happen for a reason. Or that it does.  
I'm not worried  
I'm not worried when every  
Heart beat slips out of control  
When marathons start that I thought  
We had already won. That  
Sight vanishes. Takes me to that  
Dark place. That moment  
Of stillness Attributed to nothing but  
The hurt inside. Something  
That shouldn't be happening.  
I'm not concerned that  
They will force smiles  
Behind disbelieving eyes  
That they have to look  
At this excuse of what I have become  
Or what I didn't.  
I'm not fearful that I'll have  
To settle like the salt that  
Can't dissolve, into something  
I don't want to be, in a place  
Where I never chose to be,  
The coffee grinds that fell through.

I'm terrified that heart beats will  
Slip out of control. Into marathons we will  
Lose and all faith will settle like salt  
I'm scared that my mind can't handle this.  
That my future is on the top shelf.  
I don't want to be the coffee grinds  
That fell through. Petrified.



## Autumn Equinox

All last night  
dreaming (in  
the sighing let in  
by the window)  
of sounds and strange  
masses by the sill, by  
the head, by the phone's bright-  
eyed silence, thumping and  
writhing, floating and  
falling in.

---

## Contributors

**Max Bicking** is a freshman who does most of his writing during lectures. He has been told he is a kitten.

**Stephanie Breitsman** is a recovering physics major and a self-proclaimed Middle Eastern Studies specialist. She has recently given up English, her mother tongue, for broken Arabic, poor imitations of the Russian accent, and occasionally photographs.

**Sam Brenner** wanted to be published anonymously.

**Chelsea Callahan** dreams of howling at the moon and blazing like a roman candle across the sky.

**Chloe Campbell** is a senior English major, but also a cat. She would like to be referred to as Chloe Kitten Princess starting meow. She very much appreciates the forum The Lantern has created for her to come out with this information.

**Allison Cavanaugh** is a senior media and communications major with a minor in studio arts. She likes art, spiders, cats, stick shifts, abandoned buildings, and not eating cows.

**Kristin Cichowski** appreciates the finer points of reticence, which she expressed in full by not writing a bio for The Lantern.

**Angier Cooper** is a proponent of black-market prunes, feather-dusting whale bladders, and not writing bios for The Lantern.

**Emily Duffy** prefers Wynter out of all the seasons. If she could speak, it would be in vocables. Though her authorship has been verified for the pieces included in this volume, some have argued that other work--namely, this short biography--is of a more dubious origin. This, of course, is beyond our relevant poststructural episteme.

**Rikki Eble** is in her junior year, with a major in Psychology and two minors in Secondary Education and Religious Studies. She is the president of the photography club and is currently studying abroad in Glasgow, Scotland.

---

**Shane English** is still amazed that he has nothing relevant to say.

**Isabella Esser-Munera** tried to get the last laugh by refusing to write a Lantern bio, but failed.

**Emily-Violet Fogel** is a student by day and a high class escort by night (have you ever wondered about the outfits?) When she isn't working or diligently attending classes, she collects cookie jars a la Alec Baldwin in "30 Rock".

**Quinn Gilman-Forlini**: oh man oh man, can she lay it on thick.

**Jillian Goldstein** was too busy chasing twisters with her goldfish, Jeremiah, to write a bio for The Lantern.

**Erica Gorenberg** would like there to be an interpretive dance alternative to the written biography.

**Brooke Haley's** writing is brought to you by two extremely supportive parents, one amazing younger sister, a loving boyfriend and a heaping handful of fantastic friends.

**Michael Heimbaugh** would do anything for love, but he won't do that.

**Josh Hoffman** is a freshman Environmental Studies major who is minoring in Creative Writing and Mathematics. He has an active interdisciplinary brain, somewhat photographic memory, and a lot to express, which is why staying within the word limit is a

**Olivia Hovick** haz a question: How do you write a bio? Well, here goez nothing: a senior English major, she still likez to talk like she's from the 90s; using phrasez like "dat'z not mah jam" and "I'm not tryna live dat lyfe". She usez Z's to replace S's whenever possible, if you couldn't tell.

**Kerrey Kahn** is an English major with minors in Creative Writing and Theater. His independent study this semester has been spent working on the creation of his own original TV show. He dreams of working in television.

**Dominick Knowles** is a pious servant of gentility. She favors denim apparel and words that begin with the letter J. He cites Sherane as a source of inspiration and would like to dedicate all subsequent creative work to her.

---

**Kelsey Knowles**, better known as Sasha Fierce, lived a quiet life until the inaugural lip-syncing scandal. She then decided to undergo minor cosmetic changes and mad chill at Ursinus College, slandering her name a bit more with each passing day.

**Eddy Kosik** will tell you all his secrets, but lie about his past. He frequently questions whether he enjoys telling the story of his life even more than he does living it.

**Nicole Kovacs** is currently a junior biology major. She is an avid member of the Women's Lacrosse Team and a member of Tau Sigma Gamma Sorority. She aspires to be a veterinarian.

**Julianna Lepore** is so excited to make her Lantern debut with her acrylic painting, *Wanderlust*. A New York native, Julianna is a junior East Asian Studies major with a double minor in Business Management and Chinese.

**Anna Lobo** is a senior English major who wishes she were a creative writing minor. She hopes to work as an editor someday, and she swears that next year she really, really will go through with NaNoWriMo. Really.

**Anna Lorine** is a dreamer but she's not the only one. She aspires to become a physician and vows to find a cure for writer's block. She also has the curliest hair in Pennsylvania. It is full of secrets.

**Gladys Martinez** has an interest in syntactical ambiguity, which she chose not to demonstrate when she ignored her bio writing duty for The Lantern. **Logan Metcalf-Kelly** served dishonorably in the Royal Air Force.

**Brett Neslen** is a Junior studying English and History. He recently returned from a semester in Ireland, which he described as "a puddle, but the most beautiful puddle on Earth"; somehow the alcohol didn't kill him. His story is dedicated to his sister, Marina.

**Alex Niedmann** is a kind of sad dance. He fell from her pain. Will be put into the earth forever. And gives thanks, mostly, for the hunger.



---

**Rayna Nunes** is a Junior English/Philosophy major who splits her free time between writing and acting. She is amazed and pleasantly surprised that people enjoyed her painting enough to put it in The Lantern, and she hopes her art, along with everyone else's puts a smile on your face.

**Carrie Putscher** majors in Environmental Studies, with minors in Creative Writing and Biology. She loves writing poetry and taking long naps, hates hangnails and sleeping in socks, and hopes to one day own a flock of chickens and a goat.

**Monica Reuman** is a sophomore who LOVES travel, art, Ursinus College, and the STURGIS HALL GIRLS!

**Amanda Sierzega** is a freshman English major and Creative Writing and Secondary Education minor. She considers it an honor to have her writing published in The Lantern and would like to thank Mr. Curley and Ms. Speckhals for their support the last three years.

**Tony Sierzega** assumes Lantern entries were down this year. He wrote his story in English 205 and only took the class because he was too embarrassed to dance for his art requirement (even though he looks good in yoga pants).

**Nora Sternlof** enjoys soft pretzels, Swedish hip-hop, orangutans, and long walks on the beach.

**Andrew Tran's** dog is staring at the wall again. Either he can see ghosts, or he's mulling over past social situations he wishes he'd handled better.

**Sophie Zander** would like to officially request that Ellen DeGeneres voices all of her characters in the Disney musical adaptation of her short story.

---

## Last Words

Finally, we would like to express encouragement to all those who submitted to The Lantern, but whose work did not make it into the issue. We recognize the bravery it takes to share your work and we thank you for it. In selecting and judging works for The Lantern, we make every attempt to ensure fairness. First readings are blind, and staff members are not allowed to submit in a genre for which they are serving as readers. The judges' readings are blind as well, with no input from the editorial staff. Again, we want to thank all who submitted, and we regret having to turn down so many fine works. Please consider submitting your works in the future.

Thank you,

Jenn

*The Lantern* is printed on 100% recycled paper.

---

## In Memoriam

Rachel Blunt  
1992-2013

On the day this issue of *The Lantern* was going to press, news of the death of Rachel Blunt shook the Ursinus community. Rachel was active in the arts, and known to her friends and teachers as talented and witty, creative and original. Her lyrical vision shimmers in these lines, taken from the opening and ending of "Cinibea," a story she wrote for a fiction class in 2011, set in a beautiful imagined land called The Everworld:

### *Cinibea*

*I heard a call of a bird. It sounded desperately free. A hoarse shout, thrown to the air with abandon. It sounded like the kind of bird that has black feathers, I guessed. But I was sure its beak shone with rainbows in the light. Like a pearl.*

*The citrus sky of paradise bloomed in my window. The Everworld's sky never failed to steal breath and hold gaze captive. There were such whispers of rainbow sewn into the beauty, the blue above.*

*I could still see my bird soaring away from me. I watched it disappear. Its black feathers glittered. And its beak shone with rainbows in the light. Like a pearl.*

Farewell, Rachel. We will remember you shining with rainbows in the light. Like a pearl.

-The Staff and Contributors of *The Lantern*

